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CHRISTMAS TALES OF FLANDERS

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CHRISTMAS TALES OF FLANDERS




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Bosschère

CHRISTMAS TALES OF FLANDERS



NEW YORK: DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
MCMXVII

THE SEA-MONSTERS AND THE FISHERMAN

CHRISTMAS TALES OF FLANDERS

ILLUSTRATED BY
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INTRODUCTION

THE CHRISTMAS TALES OF FLANDERS presented in this volume are popular fables and legends current in Flanders and Brabant, which have for centuries been told to children throughout Belgium. Their origin is doubtful, as all literature handed down by oral tradition must be. A good many of these stories are found in a different guise in the legends of other nations. "Seppy" is closely akin to the rhyme of "The Old Man who lived in the Wood"; and the prototypes of others will be readily recognized; but all of them have peculiar Flemish traits. They have the picturesqueness characteristic of the country which produced such a glorious school of painting, and the freshness of their presentation is a high tribute to the creative imagination of the Flanders folk. Sometimes they are primitive to a degree, and in such tales as "Simple John" and "The Boy who always said the Wrong Thing," the story-teller attributes the most elementary and artless mentality to his

heroes, so as to explain the extravagant adventures he relates. These tales occupy for the Flemish the place nursery rhymes take in England, and as the nursery rhymes have been collected in England at various times and in different forms and guises, so the Flemish folk-tales have also been collected in various ways and in various parts of Flanders. Messrs. Demont and Decock produced a book entitled "Zoo Vertellen de Vlamingen," from which collection a good many of these stories are taken. Others came from the "Brabantsch Segenboak," which J. Teiclinck wrote for the Flemish Academy. They were translated by M. C. O. Morris and are here published for the first time in English.



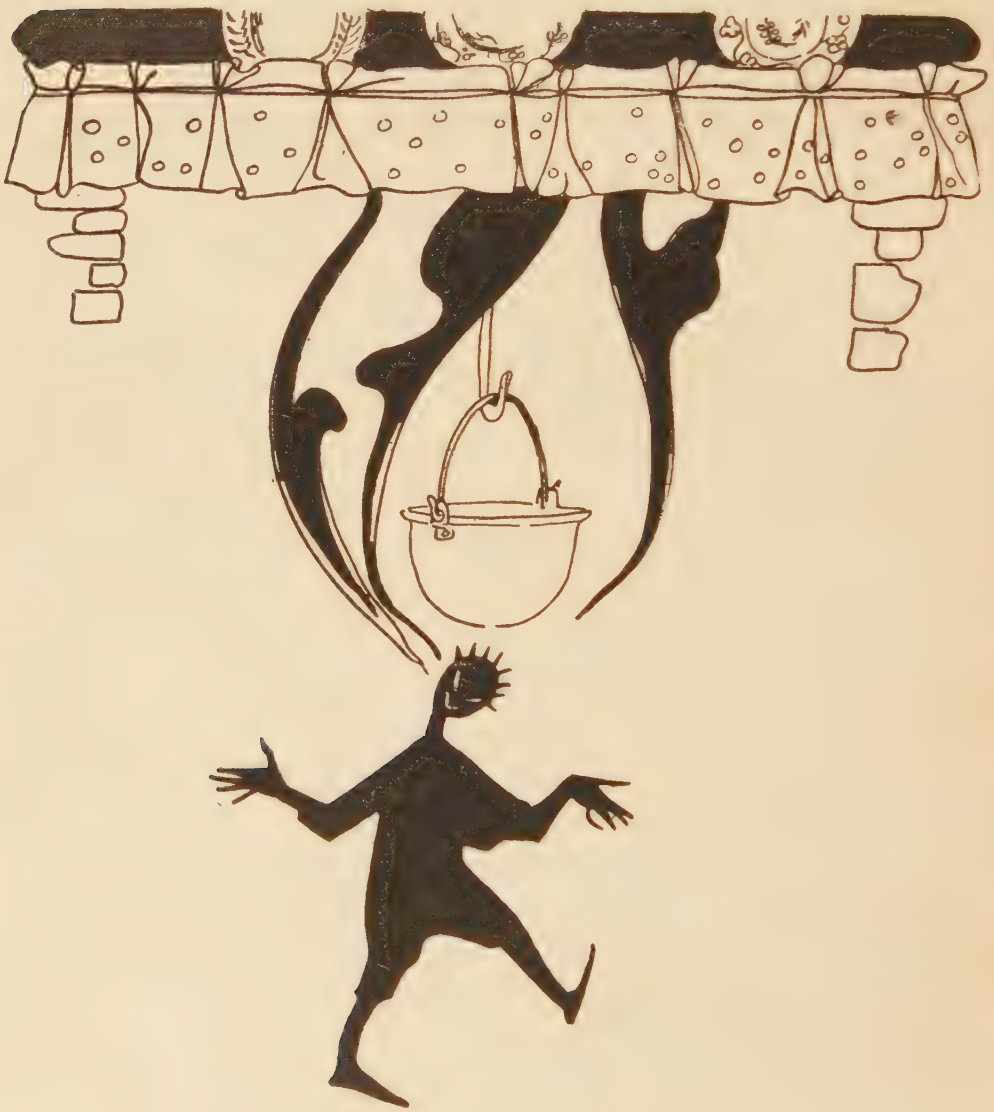


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St. Peter and the Two Women

THE RICH WOMAN AND THE POOR WOMAN

ON a cold winter night, thousands of years ago, St. Peter took one of his occasional walks on earth. Towards nightfall he knocked at a rich peasant's door. The farmer's wife was busy making pancakes in her cosy kitchen. Her little chubby baby was watching her as she poured the batter into the frying-pan. She spied the stranger through the window, and said to herself, " This fellow is attracted by the good smell, but I do not waste my pancakes on strangers." She sent the beggar away, wishing him God-speed.

He went on his way, and presently arrived at a mud cabin, where a poor widow lived with her six children. On hearing the old man begging her to have pity on him for God's sake, she opened the door and bade him stay the night in her little hut. " Night is falling," she said ; " it is bitterly cold, stay with us, and you shall have my bedroom. I will doze in a chair near the fire." The stranger gratefully accepted her offer, and after having supped, retired to bed.

Before leaving the next day, he thanked the good woman, and said to her, " Listen, little mother : as you welcomed me in



SHE SENT THE BEGGAR AWAY, WISHING HIM GOD-SPEED

your house, I give you a wish ; ask anything you like and you shall have it." The good woman thought at once of an unfinished roll of cloth which her dead husband was weaving a little before his death. Without further hesitation, she answered, " My good man, as you are so kind and so powerful, grant that the work which I begin the first thing in the morning may continue all day." " It shall be as you wish," said the stranger, as he bade her good-bye. Her six children accompanied him to the outskirts of the village, where they bade him God-speed.

Very early the next day the busy little woman began to measure the piece of cloth, which was about twelve yards long. Marvellous to relate, she measured and measured, and she found that when she had measured a certain length of cloth the pattern, texture, and designs changed. She then cut it off carefully and rolled it up, and thus as the day advanced she had rolls of cloth of every imaginable shade, design, and material. They filled the whole cabin to the rafters; there was scarcely room to

THE RICH WOMAN AND THE POOR WOMAN / THE TWO FARMS
AT CHRISTMAS EVE





THE NEIGHBOURS CAME TO SAY GOOD DAY, BUT THE CLOTH BLOCKED UP THE DOOR

move. Her children were huddled together in one spot, staring open-mouthed as she went on measuring. The neighbours came to say good day, but the cloth blocked up the door ; it was with the greatest difficulty that they succeeded in squeezing their heads through the crack. Others on tiptoe were craning their necks to gaze in amazement through the window, which was half hidden in cloth. By midnight she had sufficient cloth to supply ten villages.

The wonderful news soon spread abroad, it was the wonder of the hour. When it reached the ears of the mean, rich peasant woman, who had turned the old man so roughly from her door, she was disgusted with herself, and did not sleep a wink the following night. She thought out innumerable plans to repair her mistake. She could not come to a decision, and she had to patiently await the return of the stranger. " Probably he will return next year," she said ; " a year soon passes."



SHE WAS DISGUSTED WITH HERSELF

It was Christmas Eve. The peasant woman was again making pancakes, and she looked up from time to time to see if the old man appeared. Presently she saw him coming through the gate. Before he had time to knock, she opened the door, welcomed him in, and gave him a seat near the fire. " This time you must stay the night with us," she said ; " it is too cold and too dark to go farther." " Thank you, my good woman," said the stranger, " but I still have a long way to go to-day. I only wanted to ask the way." " No, no," said the peasant, " you must certainly stay, you cannot be better cared for ; draw up to the table and eat some pancakes ; it will do you good, and to-morrow you can go as early as you like." There was nothing more to be said. A chair was drawn up to the table ; the man was obliged to eat and drink. At bedtime they showed him into the best bedroom.

The next day the stranger thanked the woman and her husband, and said good-bye. He had already reached the gate,



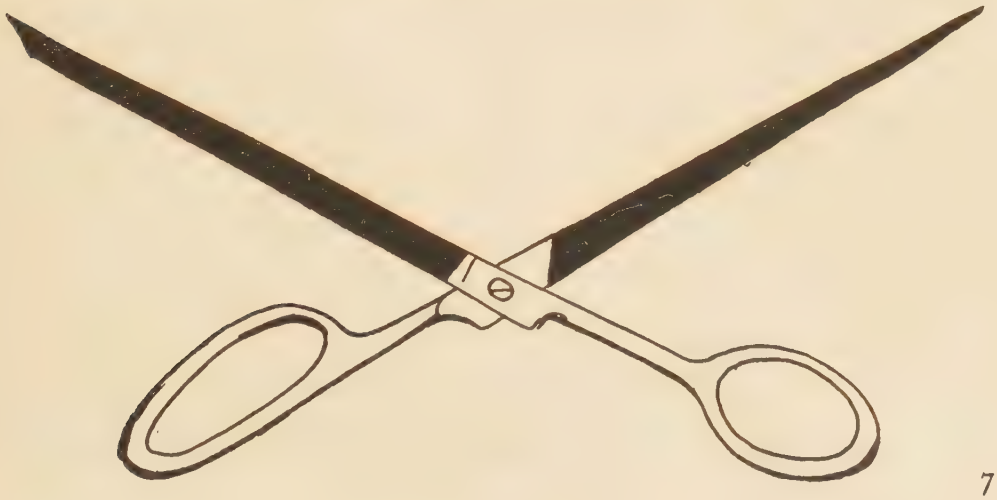
TRY AS SHE WOULD, SHE WAS OBLIGED TO GO ON CUTTING

when he said, " Woman, I can give you nothing in return for your kind hospitality, but I grant that the first work you undertake to-morrow will last all day." Then he went on his way.

The woman was overwhelmed with joy. " To-morrow we shall be very rich," she said to her husband. " I shall be more cunning than my neighbour ; I shall count money all day. I shall not waste a minute ; I shall get up at midnight, for before daybreak I must make some bags to pour our fortune into."

All that night she never closed her eyes ; on the stroke of midnight she sprang from her bed, and seizing the scissors she began to cut out the bags. But strange to say, she cut and cut until all the stuff was in fragments. Try as she would, she was obliged to go on cutting ; she seized linen, shirts, sheets, tablecloths, napkins, handkerchiefs ; even the window curtains did not escape. Then it was the turn of the wardrobe. Throwing it open, she took out her husband's wedding suit. " Look ! " she said, as she cut off his coat-tails, " these will make two more bags. Here are strings for the bags," she added, snipping off her best bonnet-strings. She went on cutting without a pause. By night she had cut up everything except the clothes she was wearing. Her husband looked on at this terrible scene, howling with rage, while his wife sighed and cried with vexation. There was nothing left ; her husband only managed to save the shirt he was wearing by running up the stairs as midnight struck.

The news of this disaster spread like wild-fire far and wide, but no one pitied the woman.





SEPPY WORKING IN THE FIELDS

THE STORY OF SEPPY WHO WISHED TO MANAGE HIS OWN HOUSE

SEPPY and Bella lived together in a very small house. There was only one room, which served as kitchen, bedroom, and stable for the animals.

All they possessed was a pig, a cow, and some hens. The pig lay on some straw between two stakes in one corner of the room, the cow was tied up to a wooden trough in another corner, the hens roosted on the rafters.

It was not a happy household ; quarrels were frequent, and Seppy was always finding fault with Bella. When he came in from his work at midday the potatoes were either too hot or too cold, the soup too thick or too thin, and he reproached Bella bitterly, declaring that she lived a life of idleness, while he worked like a slave in the fields.

These scenes became so frequent that Bella grew tired of this cat-and-dog life.

One day, when he began to grumble as usual, she defied him, insisting that the next morning they should change places : she would go to work like a slave in the fields, while he should

stay at home to do the cooking. " He will soon see," she said, " that when all the work has been done properly, there is no time for twiddling one's thumbs."

Very early next morning Bella started off with a sack and a scythe to cut grass for the animals.

Seppy remained at home and took off his coat, saying to himself, " I will show her how clever I am."

It was a Wednesday, the day for butter-making. Seppy put the churn on the three-legged stool in the middle of the room, poured in the milk, and began to churn gaily. He heard the milk beating against the sides of the churn, and whistled happily as he worked.

Presently he heard the stout village priest tramping up the road. He stopped at Seppy's cottage, put his head in at the door and asked for a glass of water, being very hot and red in the face from having walked so far.



HOWEVER, THE PRIEST HAD A GLASS

" Water is very dangerous; wouldn't you rather have a small jug of beer? " said Seppy. He left the churn and went to the beer-barrel which stood on three bricks in a corner of the room, as far as possible from the fire. The barrel had not been tapped. Seppy found the key and set about piercing the bung, using his shoe instead of a hammer. He gave such a heavy blow that he pierced right through the barrel. The beer ran all over the floor. However, the priest had a glass, and, much refreshed, he wished Seppy good day and went on his way.

" It is too bad to lose all this beer," said Seppy. He turned the empty barrel on end, mopped up the beer with a cloth and squeezed it into the barrel, and so succeeded in saving a little.

Meanwhile the pig, attracted by the smell of the beer, set to work to lap it up greedily until he could not swallow another drop.

Seppy was very angry with the pig and gave him a blow,



SEPPY WAS VERY ANGRY WITH THE PIG

but as it showed no inclination to lie down, he hit it so hard that it rushed out of the door and fell into the well. Now the well was very deep, and Seppy tried to drag the pig out, but in vain, and it was drowned.

"The beer is spilt and the pig is drowned," thought Seppy; "if any misfortune overtakes the cow, or I fail to churn the milk into butter, I shall be for ever disgraced in Bella's eyes."

He then remembered that the cow had had nothing to eat, and that he had to prepare the soup before Bella came back. "Now I am going to work methodically," he said; "I will hang the stock-pot over the fire, then take Molly to graze in the field, and then finish making the butter."

The fire soon burnt up. When he led the cow outside he could not find any grass near the house, but he saw some growing on the roof! Choosing the spot where the roof sloped very low, he succeeded after frantic efforts in hoisting Molly on to the roof. He was re-entering the house when it occurred to him that Molly might slip off the roof into the well and be drowned. He went to the well, cut the rope off the bucket and tied it round the cow's horns, throwing the other end down the chimney. He then ran into the house, caught the end of the rope and tied it round his leg.

"Now," he said, "the cow cannot escape however much she may want to, and Seppy will have made the butter and soup before midday."

The cream again lashed the sides of the churn, but Seppy had no longer the heart to sing; he was thinking about the spilt beer and the poor drowned pig.

Meanwhile the cow grazed on the roof. The earth not



SHE GRADUALLY SLIPPED TO THE EDGE OF THE SLOPING ROOF

being very firm, she gradually slipped to the edge of the sloping roof. Suddenly, alackaday! she rolled off. As the result of her fall, Seppy was drawn up the chimney, where the soup was boiling over the fire.

Poor Seppy hung head downwards as far up the chimney as Molly was off the roof. To add to his misfortunes he had overturned the stool on which stood the churn, and so upset all the cream over the floor.

When Bella came home at midday, the first thing that met her eye was the cow, which being half strangled was dying outside the door. She quickly cut the rope with her scythe. Imagine her horror when on entering the cottage she found her husband hanging head downwards, dipping into the stock-pot.



SEPPY WAS DRAWN UP THE CHIMNEY, WHERE THE SOUP WAS BOILING OVER THE FIRE

Seppy never grumbled again. From henceforth Bella busied herself with her household duties. Seppy worked in the fields as before.

Seppy said to the pots, he said to the pans,
And likewise to the stools,
That men who try to do women's work
Are all a parcel of fools.





The Death, Misery, the Old Man, and the Tree

THE ENCHANTED APPLE-TREE



NCE upon a time there lived an old woman whose name was Misery.

Her one and only possession was an apple-tree, and even this caused her more pain than pleasure. When the apples were ripe, the village urchins came and stole them off the tree.

This went on year after year, when one day an old man, with a long white beard, knocked at Misery's door. "Old woman," he begged, "give me a crust of bread."

"You, too, are a poor miserable creature," said Misery, who, although she had nothing herself, was full of compassion for others. "Here is half a loaf, take it; it is all I have, eat it in peace, and may it refresh you."

"As you have been so kind," said the old fellow, "I will grant you a wish."

"Oh!" sighed the old woman, "I have only one desire, that is, that any one who touches my apple-tree may stick to it until I set them free. The way my apples are stolen from me is past all bearing."

"Your wish is granted," said the old fellow, and he went away.



THE VILLAGE URCHINS CAME AND STOLE THEM OFF THE TREE



"Here is Half a Loaf, take it; it is all I have"

Two days later Misery went to look at her tree; she found hanging and sticking to the branches a crowd of children, servants, mothers who had come to rescue their children, fathers who had tried to save their wives, two parrots who had escaped from their cage, a cock, a goose, an owl, and other birds, not to mention a goat. When she saw this extraordinary sight, she burst out laughing, and rubbed her hands with delight. She let them all remain hanging on the tree some time before she released them.

The thieves had learnt their lesson, and never stole the apples again.

Some time passed by, when one day some one again knocked at old Misery's door.

"Come in," she cried.

"Guess who I am," said a voice. "I am old Father Death himself. Listen, little mother," he continued. "I think that you and your old dog have lived long enough; I have come to fetch you both."

THE ENCHANTED APPLE-TREE





" You are all-powerful," said Misery. " I do not oppose your will, but before I pack up, grant me one favour. On the tree yonder there grow the most delicious apples you have ever tasted. Don't you think it would be a pity to leave them, without gathering one ? "

" As you ask me so graciously, I will take one," said Death, whose mouth was watering as he walked towards the tree. He climbed up to the topmost branches to gather a large rosy apple, but directly he touched it, the wretch remained glued to the tree by his long bony hand. Nothing could tear him off, in spite of his struggles.

" There you are, old tyrant, hanging high and dry," said Misery.

As a result of Death hanging on the tree, no one died. If persons fell into the water they were not drowned; if a cart ran over them they did not even notice it; they did not die even if their heads were cut off.

After Death had hung, winter and summer, for ten long years on the tree, through all weathers, the old woman had pity on him, and allowed him to come down on condition that she should live as long as she liked.

This, Father Death agreed to, and that is why men live longer than the sparrows, and why Misery is always to be found in the world, and will doubtless remain until the end of time.





Two Monks of the Convent

THE CONVENT FREE FROM CARE



ONCE when the Emperor Charles V was travelling in the country, he saw a convent, and in passing by a little door he read this strange inscription :

" Here you live without a care."

The Emperor was very surprised and could scarcely believe his eyes.

" It seems to me an impossibility," he thought ; " does some one really exist on earth who is free from care ? As Emperor I am overwhelmed with troubles, while here in this convent, which is a little kingdom in itself, one would have nothing to worry about. I cannot believe it."

Immediately on setting foot in the village inn, the Emperor sent the hostess to fetch the Abbot of this singular convent.

You can imagine what a state of mind the latter was in when he heard he was summoned to the Emperor's presence.

" What have I done to displease him," he asked himself. On the way he examined his conscience over and over again, and he could think of no fault of which he was guilty. " I am in troubled waters ; I must steer my way through," he said.

When he was in the Emperor's presence, the latter expressed his astonishment at what he had read.

The Abbot now knew why he had been summoned, and smiled. " Sir," said he, " does that astonish you ? However, it is very simple ; we eat, we drink, we sleep, and worry over nothing."

" Well, Reverend Abbot, that state of things must come to an end," said the Emperor, " and in order that you may have your share of trouble, I command you to bring me to-morrow the answers to the three following questions :

" First, What is the depth of the sea ?

" Secondly, How many cows' tails would it take to measure the distance between the earth and the sun ?

" Thirdly, What am I thinking about ?

" Try to please me or I shall exact a penalty from you."

On hearing these words, the Abbot returned to his convent with a heavy heart. From that moment he knew no peace. He cudgelled his brains as to what answer he could make to the Emperor.



HOW MANY COWS' TAILS WOULD IT TAKE TO MEASURE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SUN ?

When the little bell of the abbey rang, summoning the monks to prayer in the chapel, the Abbot continued to pace his garden. He was so deep in thought that he was quite oblivious of what was taking place around him. Even if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, he would not have noticed it.

" What a horrible thing," he thought. " Is it possible that such a misfortune has overtaken me ? I cannot possibly answer. Who can save the situation ? Perhaps our shepherd could ; he has a very lively imagination ; but talk of the devil——"

At that identical moment the shepherd appeared, leading his

flock. He was very surprised to see the Abbot, who was always without a care, meditating in solitude.

What could have happened ?

Without more ado he went to him, and asked him what was troubling him so deeply.



"WHAT IS THE DEPTH OF THE SEA ?"

" Yes, I deserve to be pitied," said the Abbot, and he told him what had happened.

" Why are you tormenting yourself over a little thing like that ? " the shepherd laughingly replied. " Leave it to me, and all will be well. To-morrow I will come here and dress myself in your robe, and I will turn the tables on him."

At first the Abbot demurred, but in the end he yielded, and the matter was settled.

The next day the shepherd went boldly to find the Emperor.

" Well, Reverend Abbot," the Emperor said with serenity, " have you found out the answers ? "

" Yes, certainly, sire."

" Speak, I am listening."

" Sire, the sea is as deep as a stone's throw.

" To measure the distance between the earth and the sun, you only need one cow's tail, if it is long enough.

" Do you wish to know, sire, what you are thinking ? Well, at this moment, you think, sire, that the Abbot of the convent is in your presence, and it is only his shepherd."

The Emperor laughed so heartily that if he has not stopped laughing he is laughing still.



JOHN TWIST AND THE WITCHES

THE WITCHES' CELLAR

JOHN TWIST was courting a young girl who lived alone with her widowed mother.

His friends warned him that they were both witches, and that he ought to be very cautious, but he refused to believe them. One day, however, he determined to discover if it were true.

That day when he visited his fiancée, he pretended to be very tired, and after having chatted a while with the two women, he tipped his chair against the wall, drew down the peak of his cap over his eyes, in order to see what took place without appearing to do so, and feigned sleep.

"I think he is sleeping soundly," the mother said to her daughter.

"I will make certain," said the girl. She called him softly by name. The young man apparently heard nothing, and never moved a muscle.

The two women were quite reassured. The mother put on a beautiful red dress, and her daughter dressed herself in her best clothes. They then removed two bricks from the back of the stove, took out a little jar of pomade and rubbed it on their faces and hands.

When they had put everything carefully back in its place, they went out.

Then John Twist got up, and creeping as quietly as a mouse to the door, spied through the keyhole.

" Over hedges and fences, towards Spain, into the cellar," he heard them say, and at the same moment they disappeared from view.



RUBBING IT ON HIS FACE AND HANDS

" I must find out what it all means," said the lover. He went to the stove, took out the jar of pomade from its hiding-place, and after rubbing it on his face and hands, said, " Through hedges and fences, towards Spain, into the cellar."

He was immediately lifted off his feet, and found himself flying through the air like a bird. He very quickly arrived in a cellar in Spain. There he saw the two witches, in a company composed of all nationalities. They all appeared to be mad. Some wore stove-pipes or saucepans instead of hats. Some were half man, half frog or stag. In one corner, mysterious dishes were in course of preparation, under the direction of a crow in spectacles, who was holding the recipe in his claw.

John Twist was in a deplorable condition. His clothes were torn to ribbons, and his skin was grazed all over.

" How is it that you have arrived in such a tattered state," said his fiancée.

" I said, ' Through hedges and fences,' " replied John Twist ; " you may not believe me, but I assure you I have left half my clothing and skin hanging on thorn-bushes and palings."

" You ought to have said, ' Over hedges and fences,' " said the girl.

The subject was then dropped.

The company then sat down to eat tarts and drink wine out



DREW THE PEAK OF HIS CAP OVER HIS EYES, IN ORDER TO SEE WHAT TOOK PLACE

of large goblets. A witch, in a large hat, with two black cats in attendance, organized games. John Twist was so tired that he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke the entire company had vanished, with the exception of an old man who was seated at a little table with a bottle of wine before him, at the entrance to the cellar.

" Where are the two ladies I know ? " asked John Twist.

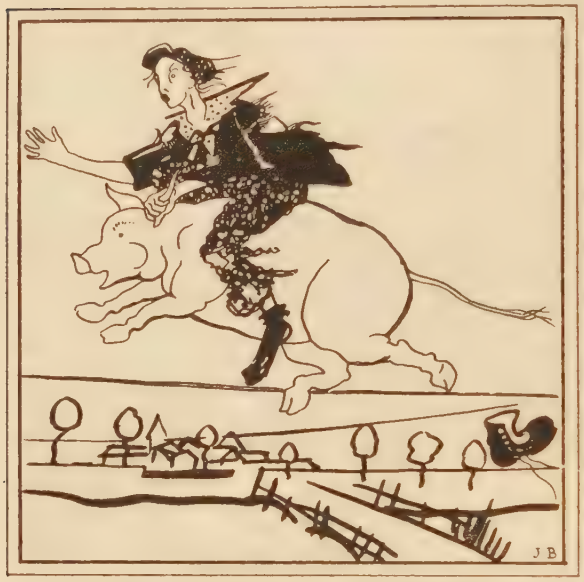
" Gone," he replied.

" How shall I return home ? " asked John uneasily.

" There is one way," said the little man ; " ride astride this pig, and he will take you home, but you must not utter a word on the way."

" Oh, if that is all," said John, " I know how to hold my tongue."

So saying, he got on the pig's back, and they started.



THE PIG TRAVELLED VERY QUICKLY

The pig travelled very quickly, obstacles were nothing to him. He leapt over hedges and ditches, until they reached a river twenty feet wide.

" We shall never arrive on the opposite bank," thought John Twist, but the thought had hardly occurred to him, when w-whip —the pig landed on the other side.

" That was a splendid jump," said John Twist. But, alack, the words were hardly out of his mouth before he was struggling in the water.

How he succeeded in getting out again, I am sure I do not know.



THE WITCHES' CELLAR





THE MILL, TONY, AND HIS MOTHER'S HOUSE

THE BOY WHO ALWAYS SAID THE WRONG THING



TONY was a very foolish, stupid boy. One morning his mother sent him to fetch a hundredweight of flour from the mill.

Knowing how silly he was, she said to him, "Tony, you will say to yourself all the way there, a hundredweight of flour, a hundredweight of flour."

"Very well, mother," he replied, and, slinging a sack over his shoulder, he walked off to the mill.

Presently he reached a field where he saw a peasant sowing. When the latter heard him say "A hundredweight of flour" instead of "Good morning," he shouted to him, half in anger, "I shall be in a bad way if this piece of ground only yields a hundredweight of flour; say rather, I wish you a thousand."



"I SHALL BE IN A BAD WAY"

"All right, I will say that," said Tony, and he repeated, as



He then came to the Church . . . on turning the Corner he saw a House on Fire

he went on his way, " I wish you a thousand." After a time he saw a shepherd and his dog struggling with a wolf. The man, thinking that Tony hoped he would be attacked by a thousand wolves, cried out angrily, " What, you good-for-nothing ! Say rather, May the devil fly away with him."

" Good, I will say that," answered Tony, and with these words on his lips he arrived at a cemetery where at that moment a corpse was being buried.

" May the devil fly away with him," said Tony.

The mourners were very indignant. " Wretched boy," said the sexton, " say rather, God rest his soul."

" All right," said Tony. He then repeated incessantly, " God rest his soul."

A passer-by who was dragging a dog to the river heard him, and cried, " What ! his soul, foolish boy ! Say rather, Get out of the way, horrid animal."

" Good," said Tony, and he repeated the new refrain.



THE STORY OF THE BOY WHO ALWAYS SAID THE WRONG THING

He then came to the church, and at that moment a newly married pair came out. When the bridegroom heard this strange greeting, he gave him a sounding box on the ears. " There, I'll teach you manners, you vulgar little boy," he said ; " why don't you say, It is a beautiful sight ? "

On turning the corner of a street he saw a house on fire. Tony stopped a moment and said, " It is a beautiful sight."

The people who were bringing pails of water to put out the fire cried angrily, " Say rather, I wish it were out."

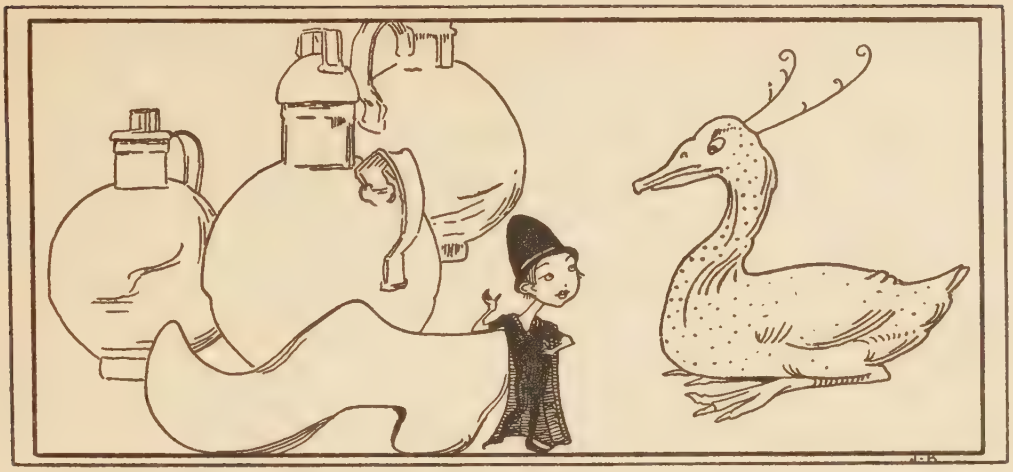
" All right, I will," said Tony. He walked on. He was now only two minutes from the mill ; the smithy was the last house he had to pass.

The blacksmith had not begun his work at the usual time that day. He had spent over a quarter of an hour trying to light his fire and had only half succeeded.

" I wish it were out," he heard some one say.

" Rascal ! " shouted the smith. " How dare you make fun of a good Christian man ? " He seized his hammer and rushed outside. But Tony had such a holy terror of this grimy man that he ran away as fast as his legs could carry him, and is probably still running, in which case, no doubt, he has met with many adventures on the way.





HOP-O'-MY-THUMB AND A DUCK

HOP-O'-MY-THUMB



HOP-O'-MY-THUMB was a tiny little fellow about as tall as your thumb.

He and his mother lived in a little hut made of dried leaves.

The little fellow was very fond of pancakes, and on Christmas Eve he begged his mother to make a dozen.

The latter replied, " Oh, Hop-o'-my-Thumb, my son, I have no butter, wood, or milk, and we are too poor to buy such things."

Hop-o'-my-Thumb was very sad and sat down on a stool by the fire, while his mother went to fetch water from the stream.

Suddenly he heard some one call him, and looking up he espied a little lady standing at his elbow.



LOOKING UP HE ESPIED A LITTLE LADY.

At first he was too much astonished to speak, but after a few seconds he blurted out, " Who are you, little lady ? " She replied, " Hop-o'-my-Thumb, I am your fairy godmother, and because

you are sad, and your mother is so poor, for this day I grant you the strength to do anything you may wish." So saying, she vanished.

At first Hop-o'-my-Thumb thought he had been dreaming, and in order to determine whether his fairy godmother had really paid him a visit, he decided to put her words to the test. He seized his cap and ran to the miller's.

" Miller," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, " my mother would so like to make pancakes on Christmas Eve, but we have no flour. Won't you give us a little ? "

" Well, Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said the miller, " if you can carry this flour-bin away you can have it."

" Do you mean that I can have whatever I can carry ? " asked Hop-o'-my-Thumb.

The miller nodded his assent, and Hop-o'-my-Thumb crawled under the mill and carried it and the entire contents home.

Afterwards he went to the butter merchant. " Boss," he said, " my mother would so like to make pancakes, but she has not a scrap of butter."

" Oh, all right, Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said the boss, " if you can carry this keg it is yours."

" Ah ! thank you," replied Hop-o'-my-Thumb. In a second he was under the keg, which moved off as if it had two legs.

From thence he went to a wealthy farmer who had been lopping his trees the day before.

" Farmer," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, " can I have a little bundle of wood, my mother wants to make pancakes."

" Oh, it is you, little Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said the farmer. " You can have the whole stack if you can carry it."

" I shall be ever grateful," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, and sliding under the stack he carried it home.

They now only lacked milk. Hop-o'-my-Thumb went to the milkman, and making a like request was given permission to carry away a whole can.

II

When the pancakes had been fried, and mother and son had enjoyed themselves to the full, the farmer who had given them

HOP-O'-MY-THUMB AND THE ROBBERS





HOP-O'-MY-THUMB THREW THEM SOME CRUMBS

the milk came to ask Hop-o'-my-Thumb's mother if her son could take his cows to graze the next day.

Next morning Hop-o'-my-Thumb went off to the field, taking a large pancake with him. On the way he came to a stream which was too wide for him to jump.

Fortunately some ducks were swimming about. Hop-o'-my-Thumb, who was a sharp little fellow, threw them some crumbs of pancake, which they swallowed greedily.

In recognition of his kindness the largest duck took him on his back and swam towards the opposite bank of the stream. In midstream he let poor little Hop-o'-my-Thumb fall into the water. However, after giving the ducks a few more crumbs he was landed safely on the other side on the back of another duck.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb, tired by his walk and wet through, lay down in the grass to rest. Presently an ant ran over the back of his hand. This so annoyed Hop-o'-my-Thumb that he caught it and killed it.

No sooner had he done so than he heard some one calling him. He recognized the voice of his fairy godmother, and looking up saw her in the grass.

This time she looked angrily at him. "Oh, Hop-o'-my-Thumb," she said, "I am much disappointed in you. Up till now I have protected you because you are such a little thing, but after your cruelty to the poor little ant I withdraw my protection, and for one day you must suffer as do other little things." She then disappeared into the ground.



POOR LITTLE ANT

Hop-o'-my-Thumb was very ashamed of himself, and, feeling very miserable, fell asleep.

Soon after a cow which was grazing in the field came up and swallowed the little fellow.

In the evening when the animals were driven into the shed, and the milkmaid waited to milk the greedy cow, she heard some one singing:

"This cow swallowed me at dawn,
Here I feel so nice and warm."

The maid was much frightened and ran to tell the farmer. The latter came to listen and he heard the same thing.

"This cow swallowed me at dawn,
Here I feel so nice and warm."

"I bet you ten to one it is Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said the farmer. "There is only one thing to be done; we must slaughter the cow in order to rescue him."

While the animal was being cut up, a poor woman passed and begged the farmer to give her a small piece of meat.

As luck would have it she received the very piece in which Hop-o'-my-Thumb was embedded. She put her present into her basket and went her way. Suddenly Hop-o'-my-Thumb began to sing:

"This cow swallowed me at dawn,
Here I feel so nice and warm."



I. THE KEG MOVED AS IF IT HAD LEGS
II. HE CARRIED IT HOME
III. MOTHER AND SON ENJOYED THEMSELVES
IV. SWALLOWED THE LITTLE FELLOW
V. STUCK THE POINT INTO THE SOLDIER'S LEG
VI. WAS PUSHED THROUGH THE VENTILATOR

" Lord have mercy, this place is haunted," cried the poor woman, and, flinging away the bag, she ran for her life.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb was greatly pleased and crawled out of the piece of meat.

At that moment he saw a soldier who had had too much to drink staggering along, so he quickly hid himself in a mole-hole. The soldier fell down on the hole and went to sleep.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb pulled his knife out of his pocket and stuck the point into the soldier's leg. The latter bounded on to his feet, stamped savagely on the hole, and returned home.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb was now a prisoner; the soldier had stamped the ground so hard that it was impossible to get out. He heard people coming down the road, and on overhearing their conversation, concluded they were robbers. He cried out, " Captain, if you will let me out of this hole, I will follow you and be your faithful servant."

" What is this whispering I hear ? " said the captain.

Every one listened attentively, and finally they were able to catch what little Hop-o'-my-Thumb was saying. They scraped the earth away, and Hop-o'-my-Thumb appeared. He was at once enrolled as a member of the band.

The same night the robbers went to a provision shop. Hop-o'-my-Thumb was pushed through the ventilator, and handed a number of cheeses through this opening. He then went to the cellar where the eggs were stored, but he made such a noise that the servant jumped out of bed to see what was happening. Quick as lightning, Hop-o'-my-Thumb crept under an egg. The servant was about to crush the egg with his foot, when the clock struck midnight. Hop-o'-my-Thumb felt himself lifted into the air. He was drawn out through the cellar window, and presently found himself at the door of his mother's cottage. He knew that his fairy godmother had saved him, and from that day forward he never did anything to forfeit her protection.





THE CAPTAIN, THE PEASANT, THE PARROT, AND THE EMPEROR

THE EMPEROR'S PARROT



NE day a parrot belonging to the Emperor Charlemagne escaped from its cage and could nowhere be found.

The Emperor, who was very fond of this parrot, which was a lovely bird, and could talk very well, promised a handsome reward for its recovery.

A peasant was fortunate enough to catch it one morning. "What luck to be able to see the Emperor," he said, "and to be assured of being well received."

Without further delay he talked the matter over with Caroline, his wife, in order to settle what he should wear and how he should behave at Court.

He decided to start on his journey the following Sunday.

He carefully brushed his wedding suit before putting it on, and thus in his Sunday best, with shining boots and chimney-pot hat, he set out for the Flemish town, carrying the parrot.

On his arrival at Ghent, he boldly entered the palace. Suddenly a loud voice cried, "Stop, peasant, do not approach a step nearer."

It was the captain of the guard who tried to prevent our hero from entering.



HE GAVE HIM BACK THE PARROT AS GALLANTLY AS HE COULD

The peasant was not to be so easily deterred and said determinedly, " I demand an audience with the Emperor."

" What have you to say to him ? " asked the captain.

" I am bringing back the Emperor's parrot," the peasant replied, and proudly drawing his coat-tails on one side he showed the cage containing the bird.

" Oh, that somewhat alters the case," replied the captain, who knew that the Emperor was searching for the bird and would reward the finder handsomely. " Nevertheless," he continued, " I shall not permit you to pass unless you promise to give me half the reward."

" I agree," said the peasant, and he went in.

When he was in the Emperor's presence he gave him back the parrot as gallantly as he could. The Emperor was overjoyed to have his favourite bird again, and gave orders that the promised reward should be given to the peasant. But our hero said, " May I be allowed to make a suggestion ? "

" Certainly," said the Emperor ; " ask what you will."

" Very well, instead of giving me money, I beg you to give me a couple of blows."

At first the Emperor and his courtiers were much astonished, and then they burst out laughing.

They naturally thought the man was joking, but seeing that he was quite serious and insisted, the Emperor gave him the two blows he desired.

The little peasant bowed respectfully and left the hall with a smile on his face. When a good distance away he could still hear the courtiers laughing. With an indifferent air he passed the gateway, having apparently quite forgotten his promise to the captain of the guard.

" Hallo ! my good man," cried the captain, " where are you off to in such a hurry ? "



HE KICKED AND STRUGGLED VIOLENTLY

" I am going home," he replied.

" Yes, but do you not remember that in order to gain an entrance you promised me half your reward ? "

" It is true, you are right," said the peasant, and turning round quite close to the captain, he gave him such a blow in the face that he saw stars. I leave you to imagine the captain's anger.

" Scamp, good-for-nothing," he cried. " I will pay you out for this. Arrest this vulgar person," he ordered, " and lock him up in the prison."

Our peasant, however, had no intention of being led like a lamb to the slaughter. He kicked and struggled violently, and made such an uproar in the guard-room that the Emperor heard it.

The latter soon arrived on the scene and was struck dumb on hearing that the peasant had had the effrontery to strike a



A PEASANT WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO CATCH IT

superior officer in the face. It was too much. The Emperor told the peasant what a very serious offence he had committed in flouting the military authority.

" Sir," said the good man, " I have in no way flouted the authority of the guard."

" Come, come," said the Emperor, " how can you deny it, when you have even dared to strike the captain ? "

" Sir, if I did it, it was at his own request," replied the man coolly.

" What do you mean ? "

" Sir, I could only obtain audience of your Majesty after having promised to give half my reward to the captain. Did I not receive two blows as reward, and ought I not to give him one of them ? That is the whole matter ; let your Majesty judge for himself."

On hearing these words the Emperor turned to his courtiers and said, " I believe this peasant to be blessed with more than ordinary intelligence, and that he could render us great service in State affairs."

Our hero returned home, and after a few days was summoned to the Court to take up an important office.

The captain of the guard, on the contrary, was dismissed in disgrace.





THE BLACKSMITH VERHOLEN AND A DEVIL

THE LITTLE BLACKSMITH VERHOLEN

THE little blacksmith was seated on a low stool with his elbows on his anvil, a prey to gloomy thoughts.

Indeed, things were going very badly for him. He, who was formerly the merry wag of the village, scarcely dared to go out for fear of meeting his friends and acquaintances, whose indiscreet questions made him blush with shame.

Gone were the days when his anvil rang merrily under the blows of ten workmen from dawn till often far into the night. Gone also the days when the savoury smell of ham and sausages pervaded the house, and his cellar was well stocked with barrels of delightful Brussels beer. The workmen had all left ; there was now barely enough work for one. There was dearth in the kitchen, and Smith's brewer lived at the bottom of a brick well, under the walnut-tree in front of his door.

He had lost all his customers. It was useless to give him work, as he had no money with which to procure the necessary materials. Of iron there were a few rusty scraps in the corners. Of coal there was hardly enough to heat the oven for an hour, and he was unable to buy any more.



A GENTLE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Yes ! the village urchins spoke true when they sang outside his window in the evening :

Smith Verholen,
Smith Verholen,
Without wood and without coal,
Without iron and without lead,
Ah ! is Smith Verholen dead ?

Dead ! No, he did not wish to die, however miserable he felt, for that would mean the end of all things, and one is dead such a long time !

He loved to live and to let live, and he still retained a grain of faith in the old proverb, " While there is life there is hope."

When evening fell, Smith, who for obvious reasons had no thoughts of supper, was aroused from his dreams by a gentle knocking at the door.

No, that could not be an urchin playing him a trick, or a

customer, as every one in the village knew of his distress. A stranger perhaps ?

Smith got up, opened the door, and saw an old man carrying a carpenter's bag and leading a donkey, on which sat a young woman, feeding her little baby. By force of habit, Smith said, " What can I do for you, my friend ? "

" Smith," replied the old man, " I know it is a late hour to trouble you ; but we have come a very long way, and we have still a very long way to travel to-night. My donkey has cast a shoe ; I beg you to shoe the beast at once, that we may continue our journey."

" I would do so with pleasure, my friend," said the blacksmith, " but I am very much afraid I have not a horseshoe left. You have no doubt noticed how poverty-stricken I am. However, come along."

He immediately began to search right and left to see if he could discover a small piece of iron.

" Perhaps I shall find enough to shoe your donkey, and then I shall be very pleased to do what you ask." He then turned to the young woman, who had dismounted, and said, " Rest yourself in the kitchen. If there is bread and milk in the larder, I pray you eat it. I possess very little, but what I have is at your service."



THE SHOE WAS TRIED ON

Smith unearthed an old shoe from a heap of old iron ; the donkey was soon tied up to the brake, and the fire was soon blazing with the help of the bellows. The shoe was tried on, put back into the fire, and then on to the anvil to round it with a stroke of the hammer, and everything was in order.

" What do I owe you, Smith ? " asked the old man.

The blacksmith, who had noticed the stranger's poor clothing and downtrodden shoes, shrugged his shoulders, and thought to himself, " Can I ask payment for such a small service from these poor creatures who have a long journey before them ? I

should be ashamed to do so, although I have not a penny to bless myself with."

He answered, "You owe me nothing, my friend; I do it for you for pity's sake."

The old man's eyes shone with a strange light, and in a solemn voice he said, "As you have helped me for the love of God, I grant you three wishes. Whatever you may ask of my wife, little child, and I, we will grant you."



HE WISHED

"Three wishes," thought the smith; "no matter what I wish it will be granted. These poor creatures so miserably clothed have the power to grant them. Who can they be?"

Only half credulous, he wished that any one who sat in his chair should be unable to get up without his consent; that any one who had the audacity to climb up his walnut-tree should not come down unless he wished it; and, lastly, that anything that was in his purse should remain in it unless he wished otherwise.

"You might have wished for Heaven, and you wish for such childish things, but never mind, your wishes are granted. Adieu, and once again thank you for your kindness."

In the darkening twilight, the trio set forth, and the smith standing at his threshold saw luminous circles shining round their heads. He then shut the door, locked it, and went to the kitchen to rest on the couch he had placed there. He had hardly taken off his coat when—tap, tap, tap—three short but loud knocks sounded at the door.

"Who is there?" asked the smith rather crossly.

No answer, but soon afterwards another knock.

" All right, who is there ? " the smith cried louder.

" Rat-tat-tat." Again the short hard blows rang on the wood, and only after asking " Who is it ? " for the third time did Smith receive an answer.

" Open the door, Smith. He who is before your door brings you happiness and riches ! "

As soon as the door was opened, the night air wafted in a strong smell of burning phosphorus, and a gentleman dressed in black from head to foot, limping heavily with one foot, came into the kitchen.



OPEN THE DOOR, SMITH

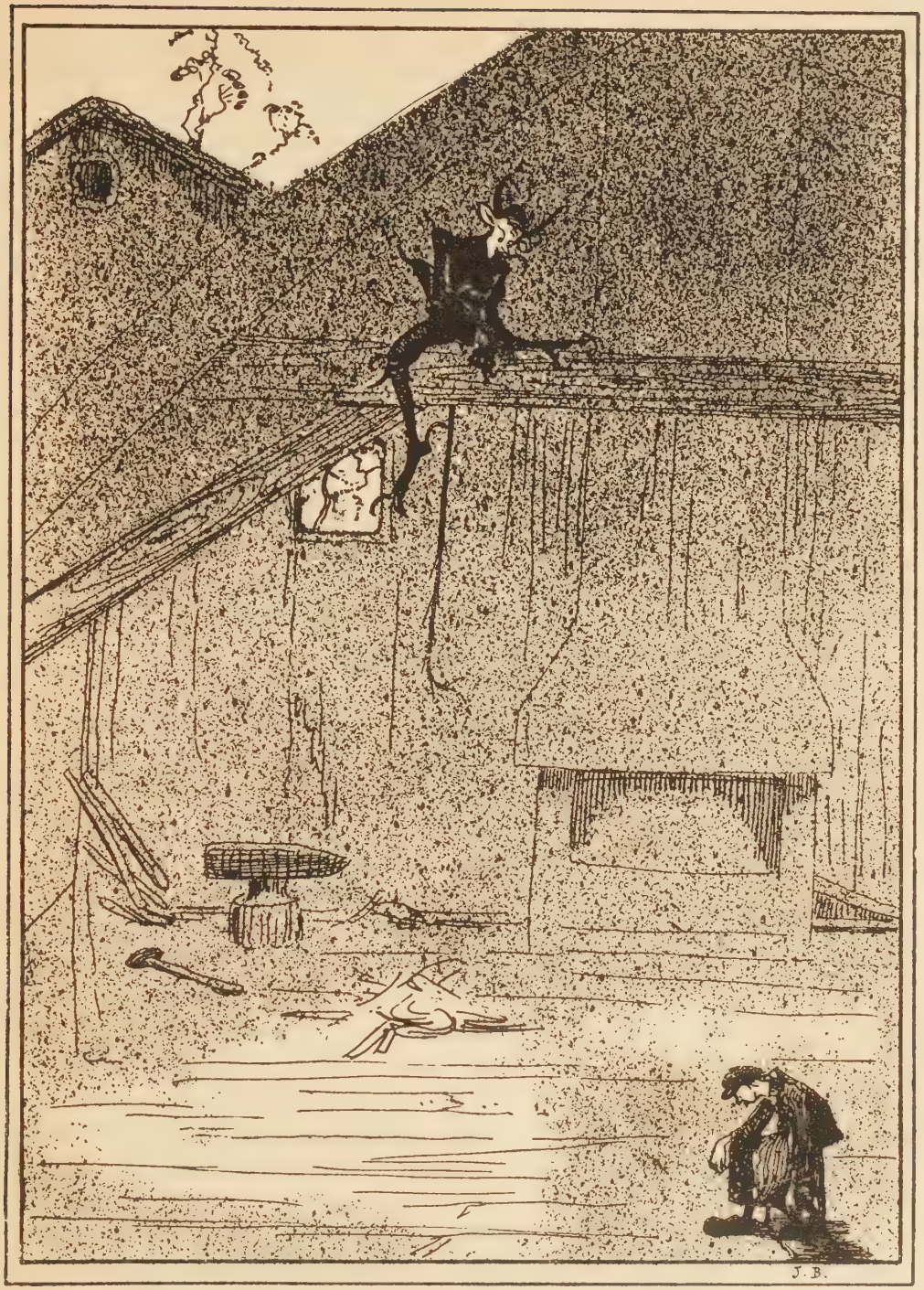
The gentleman had strange pointed ears, and a green light shone in his eyes.

" Smith," began the stranger, " I know that poverty stares you in the face; you, who knew prosperity and plenty, must find life insupportable now that your larder is bare. You deserve a better fate. Solely out of compassion for you I have journeyed a hundred thousand miles. I bring you, if you will accept them at my hands, prosperity, riches, and happiness. Come "—so saying, the sombre man drew a piece of parchment from his pocket—" put your signature to this paper, and for seven years you will have as much iron and coal as you need to employ twenty workmen."

Smith thought, " You are the Devil himself, or my name's not Smith. It is not merely for the pleasure of possessing my signature that you will give me a seven years' supply of iron and coal. You have something up your sleeve."

In order to find out, he asked to read the document. There he found written in black and white, that after seven years the Devil would be master of Smith's most treasured possession, his immortal soul.

However, our Smith was not unduly alarmed. " If I accept," he thought, " I am saved and shall be able to laugh in the face of those who have despised me. If, on the other hand, I refuse, one day I shall kill myself in my despair, and I shall be in the



THE LITTLE BLACKSMITH WAS SEATED ON A LOW STOOL

hands of the little black gentleman. The best thing to do is to sign the agreement. Later on I shall discover a means of saving my soul from Hell."

Without further hesitation, he put his name to the paper, and even before the Devil departed, the miraculous took place.

His fire lighted itself, and a delicious joint of beef was roasting on the spit. On the table he found a large jug of foaming beer, all kinds of pastries, and, better than all, half a dozen carts drawn up at the door of the forge, from which about twenty workmen were silently unloading coal, wood, iron, lead, zinc, and even copper. They carried everything into the forge.

From early morning the forge again trembled under the strokes of the hammer. They often resounded even after the village slept.

Meanwhile the days flew by, days became weeks, weeks months, and months years. Before Smith had had time to think about it, the seven years had passed, and the Devil came to claim poor Smith's soul.

" Hallo ! Listen to me, Smith Verholen.

Don't you remember that for seven years' iron and coal
You sold to me your immortal soul ? "

Smith was as unperturbed as though he were serving a customer. " Hallo ! Good morning," he cried, laughing. " How are you ? You appear to be well fed, for you have a face like a butcher's, and calves like a groom."



REST A WHILE IN THIS CHAIR

The fallen angel was visibly impatient at this nonsense, and answered sharply, " You know what you sold to my master seven years ago. No more shuffling, follow me at once to Hell."

" How should I have forgotten our agreement ? " said Smith. " How could you think me guilty of such a thing ? I am a man of honour, as I am about to convince you. Only I cannot go with you in my working clothes, and without washing my hands and brushing my hair. A moment's patience. Rest a while in this chair. I shall be with you directly."



CLIMBED UP THE TREE LIKE A CAT

The Devil, quite unsuspecting, sat down on the chair, and waited. A few minutes later Smith reappeared in his best clothes.

"Hallo! old fellow, have you rested long enough?" he asked. "I am quite ready to start."

With a broad grin on his face, he watched the Devil's vain efforts to rise.

"Oh, what has happened?" said the Devil. "It seems to me that black magic is also practised here. I cannot rise from this chair."

"Yes, my friend," said Smith, with the most innocent look, "it is a little joke of my own. Do you know what it means? That you will remain there at my pleasure."

The Devil made frantic efforts to rise, but all in vain; he was at Smith's mercy, and was as though screwed to the chair. This was hardly to his liking, and when he saw Smith heating an iron bar, and glancing at him significantly from time to time, he decided that his best course was to take it quietly.

"Smith," he began in pleading tones, "listen to me. I will give you iron, wood, and coal for another seven years, but for the love of God let me get out of this chair."



AS MUCH COAL AS HE COULD WISH

"I accept; you are free," replied the other, rubbing his hands, and the Devil departed.

Now the blacksmith Verholen had as much iron and coal as he could wish. From dawn till evening the anvil shook under the strokes of the hammer. Again the days flew by, became weeks, months, then years, and one fine morning the same Devil came to Smith's door, and cried in thundering tones, "Hallo! How now! Smith Verholen.

Don't you remember that for seven years' iron and coal
You sold to me your immortal soul?"

"Ha ha! there you are again," said our friend, and he immediately took off his leather apron in preparation for a start.

" You are a little later than the appointed time. I have such splendid walnuts, I should like to gather a little basketful to nibble on the way. I have heard that devils like nuts. Would you gather me a basketful, as you can climb so well ? Come, will you do it ? "

The Evil Spirit, seeing no cause for suspicion, climbed up the tree like a cat.

When Smith returned, he cried in jeering tones, " Hallo ! are you coming down ? Have you not gathered enough nuts ? I am quite ready to start, you know."



ORDERED THEM TO BURN THE DEVIL'S FEET WITH HOT IRONS

The little black gentleman, in spite of all his efforts, could not climb down from the branches. They closed round him as though they had taken root. Smith summoned his workmen and ordered them to burn the Devil's feet with hot irons. When the martyrdom had continued some minutes, the Devil shouted to Smith :

" I implore you to make them stop. I will give you iron and coal for yet another seven years, if only you will let me climb down from this tree. Ooh ! Ooh ! my poor toes."

" You are free as air," answered Smith ; and the Devil fled away as though pursued by a devil himself.

The years soon sped away, and this time Lucifer, accompanied by many other devils, came to fetch Smith's soul. He was dressed in deep black, as though in mourning for his mother.

Smith greeted this important person very humbly, and exclaimed, " Bravo ! bravo ! I am very pleased at the prospective honour of travelling with such an august person. I am extremely sensible of this great favour."

THE DEVIL BEATEN THREE TIMES





"Come, be quick; I have no time to waste in idle words," the Devil replied. "You are awaited in my kingdom, where you will be treated with the honour you deserve! Ahem! If you think you can trick me as you did the other devil, you are very mistaken. Up you get, forward march!"

"Sire," replied Smith very quietly, "I have heard say that you possess the power to make yourself as big as you like. I should like to know if it is true, as I never believe such foolish tales."

"I most assuredly can," said Satan with great dignity, "and to prove my words I will make myself as tall as the tower of the village church."

He immediately grew so tall that he went through the roof, sparks darting from his eyes, and lighting up the countryside: houses, gardens, fields, and pasture land.

"I must admit it is truly marvellous, but could you make yourself small enough to go into my purse?"

"I can easily do that," replied Satan, and in a trice he was in the little purse, the little enchanted purse, which was immediately shut and placed on the anvil.

"Ha ha! You did not



"I WILL MAKE MYSELF AS TALL AS THE TOWER"

bargain for that, did you, my friend?" said Smith. "Now you will receive a few gentle blows with the hammer." Hearing this, all the devils flew away in disorder.

He summoned all his workmen, and each in turn pounded Lucifer with their hammer, so gently, so very gently, until the prisoner promised never to torment Smith again. On the other hand, he promised that he should always receive his supplies of coal, iron, and wood from Hell.

With a red-hot nail Smith burnt a little hole in the purse. "Sssst" it hissed, and the Devil made his escape and disappeared.

Again days became weeks, months, and years, and one day it was not a messenger from Hell who came to the forge, but Death, who is no respecter of persons, and Smith left the earth.



IT WAS NOT A MESSENGER FROM HELL

He was now in a strange land, the land up above. He found himself before a forked road. On the left he saw a wide, well-kept road with an avenue of trees and flowering shrubs. To the right a rough and narrow path overgrown with brambles and thorns. The wide road descended, and the narrow path seemed to ascend a mountain side in the direction of Heaven. Smith chose the wide road, and presently arrived before a high and gloomy gateway, on which was written in letters of fire, "Hell."

"I am curious to see what it is like in there," thought Smith, and he deliberately pulled the bell.

"Who is there?" said a voice from behind the door.

"Only a poor blacksmith who has just died."

"What is your name?"

"John James Francis Lewis William Verholen."

He had hardly uttered the word Verholen, when the doorkeeper began to scream so loudly that all the devils, including Lucifer himself, ran to see what was the matter. All he could say was, "Smith Verholen is there; the terrible Smith Verholen."



HE WAS DRESSED IN DEEP BLACK



"Let that Good Fellow have a Glimpse of Heaven"

Then hundreds of evil spirits trembled and shivered so violently that the door creaked on its rusty hinges, and the windows of Hell rattled.

"If that is the state of things, I shall never succeed in getting inside," said Smith, and he decided to retrace his steps, and to take the narrow path.

After walking some hours, he arrived before a splendid castle surmounted with high pointed turrets, and surrounded by a high wall, in which was a white carved doorway, on which was written in luminous letters, "This is the Gate of Paradise. Here enter the good and wise."

Without hesitation, Smith decided to try his luck with the inhabitants of Heaven. He very carefully wiped his hands on his leather apron, and then knocked at the door. After a few minutes the grill in the door was opened, and an old man's bearded face appeared. He asked in a pleasant but severe voice, "Your name?"

" John James Francis Lewis William Verholen," our pilgrim replied, as he had done at the Gate of Hell.

" Smith Verholen," cried St. Peter indignantly, " you are reckless boldness personified. How dare you come here? You sold your soul to the Devil. Your place is in the nethermost Hell."

" That was my own idea, but they refused me admission. As I have come such a long way, I beseech you, good St. Peter, let me at least look through a crack in the door to catch a glimpse of the Divine radiance."

" You shall never enter here," said St. Peter, and he was about to close the grill, when a voice behind him said, " Little Peter, let that good fellow have a glimpse of Heaven. . . . I know him, he is very good-hearted. He gave shelter to Mary and me when we were fleeing into Egypt."

St. Peter did not altogether approve, but dared not oppose St. Joseph's wishes. He half opened the door, and Verholen put his head through the crack and looked in. As quick as thought our pilgrim threw his leather apron inside, and uttered all kinds of strange cries, such as " Ooh! boo! ooh! my poor head, you are crushing it. Ooh! ooh! my ear, my neck, my nose." He pushed the door with his shoulder, and before St. Peter could stop him, he was seated on his leather apron, and cried, " Here I am, sitting on my own property, my friend. No one can turn me out."



" OOH! BOO! MY POOR HEAD "

St. Joseph laughed heartily, and St. Peter himself was forced to acknowledge that Smith had played his part well.

So Smith remained in Heaven and had as much work to do as on earth. He had to repair the swords, breastplates, helmets, and shields which the archangels wore when they amused themselves by punishing the devils who became too bold.

This work was a pleasant pastime for Smith. In his spare moments he chatted a little with old friends he met in Paradise,

THE PROCESSION





humble and simple folk like himself, such as the Girl without Hands, Hop-o'-my-Thumb, Little Red Riding Hood, the Babes in the Wood, Snowdrop, and Puss in Boots.

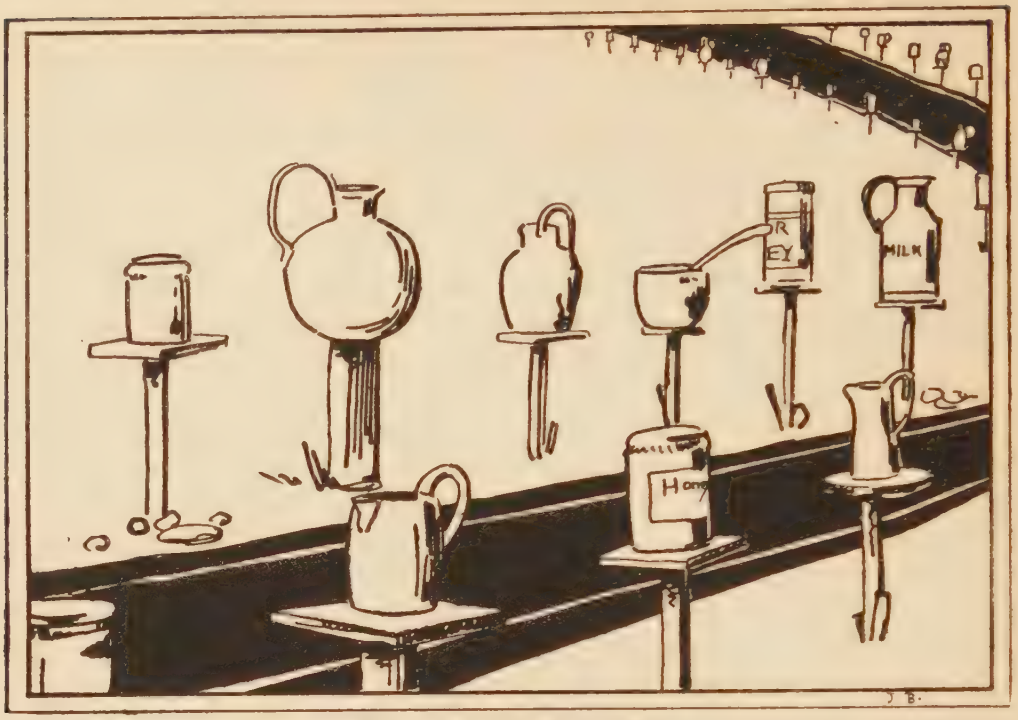
There was one thing which very much displeased Smith. He enjoyed the rice pudding with plenty of sugar, which was served in golden plates and eaten with silver spoons, and the heavenly scones with butter spread thickly. But he never had a drop to drink, never a hand at " whist " or " bridge." He found that dull, so dull that sometimes he secretly wished himself back on earth, among his friends and acquaintances in his own village in Brabant.

It was Easter Eve, the bells of Heaven were ringing for the great feast. St. Peter came to Smith, and said to him, " As you are aware, Smith, to-morrow we fête the Lord's Resurrection. On this occasion, the heavenly host goes forth in procession. All the saints and all the elect take part. I know you are very strong. Will you carry the large flag and walk at the head of the procession ? You will go out by the principal gate, mount the fortifications, and continue straight ahead to the end of the Milk-and-Honey Avenue. Directly you hear the sound of the canon, you will turn round. Every one in the procession will do the same, and, retracing their steps, re-enter Heaven."

" Dear me," thought Smith, " that may be my opportunity for returning to earth." He placed himself in St. Peter's hands and promised to do his best.

Easter dawned, High Mass was over, and the procession set forth. Right in front walked our Smith bearing the flag, then followed a countless host of cherubim, seraphim, and other angels led by St. Michael, seated on the flaming horse which drew Elisha's chariot ; then dressed in glittering armour, all mounted on flaming chargers, St. Martin, St. George, St. Victor, St. Maurice, St. Sebastian. All these had been warriors on earth. Then came the martyrs, confessors, hermits, and pilgrims —more than tongue could number ; then followed the Blessed Virgin surrounded by seraphim ; and, lastly, Our Lord Himself clothed in papal robes, under a golden canopy.

Smith did exactly as he was told ; he went out by the Great Gate, mounted the fortifications of Heaven. He walked with great dignity and with measured tread until he reached the



MILK-AND-HONEY AVENUE

Milk-and-Honey Avenue. Then suddenly, " boom" the canon sounded, and was answered by all the echoes of Heaven. Smith turned round, all the procession did likewise and re-entered Paradise. When our standard-bearer found he was the last before the gate, he signed to an angel in front of him and begged him to hold the flag for a moment ; he then turned round and disappeared to the left.

In a few hours he found himself on earth once more before the door of his smithy.

No one in Heaven grieved at his departure. Smith recommenced his happy life on earth, and from the words of the song which is still sung by Flemish children, one may conclude he is still alive.

Smith Verholen, Smith Verholen,
For seven years received wood and coal,
Iron, lead and copper,
From the devil Lucifer.
Smith Verholen may burn, may be knocked on the head,
But Smith Verholen is never dead.



BALTEN, THE BARREL, AND THE WOLF

BALTEN AND THE WOLF



ONG, long ago, when the animals were able to speak, two brothers called Jack and Balten lived in a little hut in a dense and gloomy forest in Flanders.

Needless to say they were very poor or they would not have lived in this lonely wood.

One day, Jack was sitting at the window plaiting a whip, while Balten was at the fire preparing their supper. Suddenly a wolf rushed into the house with his mouth wide open and ran towards Jack. The latter, seeing his danger, looked to his brother for help. He had an inspiration and cried loudly: "Balten, pour! Balten, pour!" Balten understood what Jack meant. Quick as lightning he seized the saucepan and poured the boiling soup over the wolf.

The wolf fled out of the door howling with pain, for his back was terribly burnt, while Jack and Balten, having recovered from their fright, laughing heartily, watched him run off into the distance.

When the wolf, half dead with pain and shame, heard peals of laughter behind him, he turned round and shouted to them:

"Ah, ruffians, good-for-nothings and scoundrels, you are much amused, but wait; whichever one of you I see first I shall devour!" So saying he disappeared among the trees.



THE WOLF STARED AT JACK

Shortly afterwards Jack went to gather acorns for their little pig. He was deep in the forest, when suddenly he saw a wolf a few yards in front of him, watching him from among the bushes.

Jack was very much frightened, especially as he saw scars on the wolf's back, and thus immediately recognized him as the one they had so shamefully handled. The wolf stared at Jack, and on recognizing him sprang at him, crying :

" Oh, ruffian, good-for-nothing ! You are one of the scoundrels who treated me so badly that I dare not show my face anywhere. Wait ! I shall at once make mincemeat of you."

The wolf was about to spring at Jack, but the latter, seeing that to fight would be useless, climbed like a cat up the nearest tree. There he was high and dry and out of his enemy's reach, as he fondly imagined. But the wolf was not to be thwarted ; smothering his rage he disappeared behind the bushes.

" I will stay quietly here," thought Jack. " I must be on my guard against this wretch. I lose nothing by waiting."



"BALTEN, POUR ! BALTEN, POUR !"

He was right, for in five minutes the wolf returned accompanied by a dozen wolves as bad as himself.

"Ha ha, scoundrel," he cried, "you will not escape me this time! If you think you are safe you are greatly mistaken, you know. We shall have you down in no time."

What did the wolf do?

He planted himself firmly near the tree trunk and formed the base of a ladder for his companions. They seemed quite accustomed to this trick, for another wolf immediately climbed on the shoulders of the first. Then a third and fourth followed his example.

At first Jack was very much amused at the idea of such a ladder and roared with laughter. But he soon realized that it was no joke, but a very serious matter. The ladder of wolves became so high that Jack, frightened out of his wits, had to climb into the topmost branches of the tree.

The ladder became yet higher!

"Have you caught him?" cried the first wolf.

"A little higher," replied the topmost wolf.

"Do not let him escape," shouted the first wolf, "for it is a tasty morsel and we shall enjoy it. It is such a long time since I have eaten any that I quite forget the taste of human flesh."

"So do I," said another wolf; whereupon they all laughed.

Jack was in no laughing mood; he was so frightened that he had cold shivers down his spine.



THE LADDER BECAME YET HIGHER

" Oh, heavens ! " he thought, " what a terrible death to be eaten alive ! What will my poor brother say when I fail to return ? I have no means of defending myself, not even boiling soup."

The wolf which was to reach him had already begun to ascend ; he heard him grunting and panting. In his distress Jack had an inspiration and began to shout at the top of his voice : " Balten, pour ! Balten, pour ! "

This had a curious effect. The first wolf, who supported all the others on his shoulders and who knew by experience what " Balten, pour ! " meant, believed that Balten was behind the tree ready to throw boiling soup on his back. He leapt aside as quick as lightning and ran like a hare. At the same time all the wolves fell down one on top of the other, howling fiercely. One had a paw broken, another a crushed foot, and a third had his head smashed in.



ONE HAD A PAW BROKEN

All swore at their cowardly comrade, who had organized the undertaking and then so treacherously deserted them. Those of them who were still able to run chased the coward and soon caught him.

" Oh ! that is the way we were to help you get the man out of the tree. Your intention was to do us all a bad turn."

They all set on to the unhappy wretch, who only made good his escape after having all his skin torn off and losing an ear.

Jack, now recovered from his fright, was a spectator of this scene and laughed long and loud. " What a curious result my crying ' Balten, pour ! ' had," he thought, and he returned home.

More than a year passed and neither Jack nor Balten had met the famous wolf.

The time came when Jack had to take the little pig, now well fattened, to market. After selling it, he was on his way home, when he was attacked by robbers. They stole his money and knocked him about. Not satisfied with this, they put him into an empty barrel, which they found by the roadside, and nailed down the lid.



THEY PUT HIM INTO AN EMPTY BARREL

Poor Jack was now a prisoner and could not imagine how he could ever hope to escape. There was only one aperture, through which he could hardly squeeze his hand.

However, he did not despair. " Time cures everything," he thought; " I have been in greater danger ! "

For several hours he was thinking and meditating in the barrel. Suddenly he heard a sniff quite close to him. He looked out and saw the wolf, the famous wolf with scars on his back !

Jack watched him, and as soon as the animal's tail was within his reach, he seized it through the hole in the barrel and cried as loud as ever he could :

" Balten, pour ! Balten, pour ! "

This shout again had the desired effect : the wolf, mad with fear, fled, dragging the barrel after him. Jack held tightly on to his tail, shouting all the time as loudly as before : " Balten pour ! Balten, pour ! "

The louder he shouted, the faster ran the wolf. The barrel

crashed and banged against the trees, it cracked and finally broke. The ribs fell in and Jack found himself once more on his feet, none the worse except for a few bruises.

The wolf ran on and on. Perhaps he is running still ?





THE MERMAID AND THE CHILD

THE MERMAID

LONG ago, in a little hut by the seashore, there lived a fisherman's widow with her only child.

The water had a wonderful fascination for the little girl. Nothing delighted her more than playing on the golden sands, where the tide washed up thousands of shells. She ran gaily with her small naked feet into the water, jumping over the little waves, which came rolling in from the deep like little white horses.

The mother, who still grieved in secret the loss of her husband, who had been snatched from her by the cruel sea, looked on sadly at her child's play. She dreaded that the sea would steal from her her one and only remaining treasure.

" My child," she besought her each morning, " do not go beyond the sand-hills. The sea is wicked and cunning, my darling. It swallowed up your dear father ; do not go near the treacherous water."

However, she was not able constantly to watch her little girl, and it so happened that one day she awaited her in vain. She searched for her everywhere, ran up and down the sand-hills, questioning all the fishermen she met, but in vain ! No one could give her tidings of the little girl.

When evening fell, and the sun had sunk like a ball of fire

into the sea, the poor mother returned to her home in the blackest despair.

Presently she heard a voice singing. The voice rose from the waves as they lashed the sand-hills. She looked up and saw a mermaid with plaited hair, and a crown of coral and pearls, standing waist-high in the water.



SHE FELL ON HER KNEES

The words of her song were :

Under a roof of sparkling water
In a crystal palace,
My little loved ones play.

On hearing this, the widow thought that her child might be among the little loved ones. She fell on her knees, and implored the mermaid to tell her if she had seen the little girl who played on the sands every day. " Yes, I certainly know where she is," replied the mermaid, " she grows and prospers with thousands of other children in my crystal palace at the bottom of the deep blue sea. She is happier than any child on earth."

With a fresh outburst of weeping the mother begged the mermaid to restore to her her child. The water queen answered her that she was touched by her grief, but that the sea never returned alive the mortals it took away. The only thing she could do for the poor mother was to allow her to descend with her to her watery palace in order to see her child.

" Will you have the courage," she added doubtfully, " to follow me on the mighty ocean for a hundred hours towards the West, and to dive with me where the sea is deepest, far down beneath the waves ? "

" I have the courage," answered the mother ; " I am ready to follow you."

Then the mermaid swam ashore near the sand-hill. She



EVERY MORNING THE MERMAID LOOKED IN AT THE WINDOW

told the widow to seat herself on her green and scaly fish's tail, then she swam away faster than the fastest ship over the surface of the water. The boundless sea was soon plunged in the darkness of night as they continued their journey towards the West.

At length a ray of light was visible on the bosom of the ocean, and presently they came to an archway of coral, which they entered. "Here we are," said the mermaid, "take a deep breath into your lungs; courage, we are going to dive."

The dive was much quicker than the voyage over the ocean, and in a few seconds they found themselves in the most marvellous palace that mortal eyes have ever beheld. It was exactly as the mermaid had described it.

The roof was of sparkling water.

The building of crystal, flooded with a golden light.

The mother paid no heed to these splendours. She looked around on every side in the hope of discovering her beloved child. The mermaid led her into a hall framed with silver, to a glass door, behind which they saw a number of little girls and boys playing happily together. The mother was allowed to look as long as she pleased, but was forbidden to enter the room.



A NUMBER OF LITTLE GIRLS AND BOYS

At first she could not see her child, but afterwards discovered her among a group of merry children. She was in blooming health, and was enjoying herself every bit as much as her companions.

The mother was very unhappy, and begged the mermaid to allow her to live in her palace, as she could not bear to be far away from her little girl. Her request was granted, and every

day she would look with longing eyes through the glass door. She implored the mermaid daily on bended knee to allow her to return home with her child, but in vain.

One day she took pity on her, and said, " I will give you back your child, but on one condition."

" Ask what you will," said the mother ; " I am willing to do anything possible."

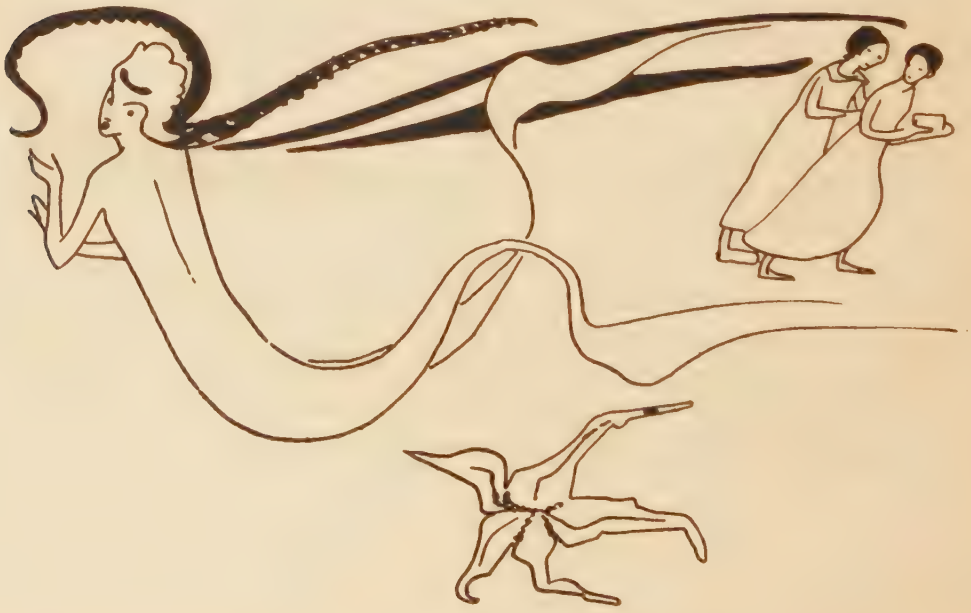
" You must weave me a cloak of your own hair," said the mermaid. " Here is a pot of ointment which will make your hair grow again."

The mother immediately set to work ; she continued without a pause day and night.

Every morning the mermaid looked in at the window of her room to see what progress she had made. She could only make half a cloak, as she had used all her hair. She begged the mermaid to be satisfied with this, but in vain ; she was immovable and demanded that the work should be completed.

At length, after sad years of waiting, the wonderful cloak was finished. The mermaid was delighted with it, and the little girl, now a young maiden, was restored to her mother.

The mermaid ordered a beautiful rounded barque, inlaid with shells, and with a brazen pelican as figure-head. Four mermaids were harnessed to it, and took the mother and her child across the mighty deep, back to their own home, where they lived happily ever after.



THE MERMAID, THE MOTHER, AND HER DAUGHTER







THE HALF-COCK, THE TWO FOXES, AND THE TWO ROBBERS

THE STORY OF THE LITTLE HALF-COCK

JOHNNY and Molly lived in a little hut in the forest. When their parents died they were left quite alone in the world, and had to divide their heritage between them. They were dreadfully poor and possessed nothing but two hens and a cock.

The puzzle was how to divide these animals into equal shares.

At last Molly said, " Let us cut the cock in two, and have half each." This was done ; Johnny had the part with the head, and Molly had the tail end.

Molly plucked her portion of the cock, and put it into the saucepan.

Suddenly Johnny's godmother, who was a fairy, appeared down the chimney. " Listen," she said to her godson, " you must not put your half into the saucepan ; I will enchant him, and he will do anything you wish."

On saying which the fairy thrust her wand in the cinders, murmured some strange words, and then touched the head of the Half-cock with her wand.

The clock struck midnight.



I WILL ENCHANT HIM

" Good-bye," said the fairy, and she disappeared up the chimney.

" That is all very well," said Johnny to his sister, " but what are we going to do with the Half-cock now ? "

Molly, who was the cleverer of the two, thought to herself, " If we had money we should have everything we want." She said, " Send him to Mr. Brauncastle's to fetch three bags of silver."

The cock started off immediately.

On the way he met two robbers, who were much surprised, and said to him, " Little Half-cock, where are you running to ? "

" To Mr. Brauncastle's," he replied.

" May we go with you ? "

" Yes, hide yourselves under my wings."

The robbers settled themselves as comfortably as they could under the Half-cock's wings.

A little farther on they overtook two foxes.

" Little Half-cock, where are you going ? " they asked.

" To Mr. Brauncastle's castle."

" May we come with you ? "

" Yes, hide yourselves under my wings."

In less than a second the foxes had joined the robbers.

At length the Little Half-cock came to a large pond which was equally inquisitive.

" Little Half-cock, where are you running so quickly ? " asked the water.

" To Mr. Brauncastle's castle."

" May I come with you ? "

" Yes, hide under my wings." Drip, drip—the water joined the other lodgers.

Ring-a-ding-ding ! The Half-cock rang at the castle door.



THEY IMMEDIATELY MOUNTED TWO HORSES

" Tell your master that I want three bags of silver."

" What an impertinent creature ! " thought the servant who answered the door. He took the message to his master. The latter replied, " Put the Little Half-cock into the chicken-run with the hens." This was done.

When night fell the Half-cock said to the foxes, " My good fellows, come out from under my wings, and eat all the hens."

There was no need to tell them twice ; they set to work with a will, feathers flew in all directions, and before you could count three they had eaten the lot. When the servant went to the chicken-run the next morning, he was horrified, and said to his master in a trembling voice, " All the hens have been eaten. The Little Half-cock is roosting on the rafters, crying, ' Cock-a-doodle-do ! Cock-a-doodle-do ! ' "

" Well, put him into the stable," said his master. The servant did so, but the next night the Little Half-cock set the robbers at liberty. They immediately mounted two horses, and in the twinkling of an eye they galloped off.

" Now I know what to expect," the servant said the next day, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. " This time the wretched thief shall not escape me."

The Little Half-cock was shut up in a red-hot oven. Now it was the water's turn to escape, and the fire was immediately put out.

The next day the water had risen to the first story, and the Little Half-cock was swimming courageously on the surface, crowing as loudly as ever he could.

" Give him three bags of silver as quickly as ever you can," said Mr. Brauncastle ; " get rid of him or he will ruin me and all my family."

The Little Half-cock went away and gave the money to his master.

Johnny and Molly were now rich, very rich.

They are very happy and get on well together ; the Little Half-cock lives with them, and is their best friend.





THE WATER JOINED THE OTHER LODGERS



The Blacksmith, the Dwarf, and his Hat

THE DWARF AND THE BLACKSMITH

ONCE upon a time there was a poor blacksmith who had no possessions other than his wife and six children. He worked like a nigger from morn to night, and it was all he could do to make both ends meet at the end of each year.

One day he went to see a dying friend who lived some distance from the village, and it was very late when he returned home. On the way the road wound round a hill, at the foot of which lay a wood. As he turned the corner of the road he heard a strange sound. In front of him, surrounded by an embankment crowned with willow-trees, was a field flooded by moonlight, where several little men with long beards were disporting themselves. They were throwing their red caps in the air, and catching them very skilfully on their toes.

Our blacksmith, who was not the bravest of mortals, dared not go on, and hid himself behind a large tree among the bushes. After he had been there some time there was a sudden silence, and quick as lightning all the little dwarfs disappeared into the hill. On peering round him, the blacksmith discovered that one dwarf remained behind. He seemed to be looking for

something. He saw him put his arm into a crack in the rock several times and draw it out.

"This little fellow cannot harm me," thought the smith; "I should very much like to know what he is looking for."



"THIS LITTLE FELLOW CANNOT HARM ME"

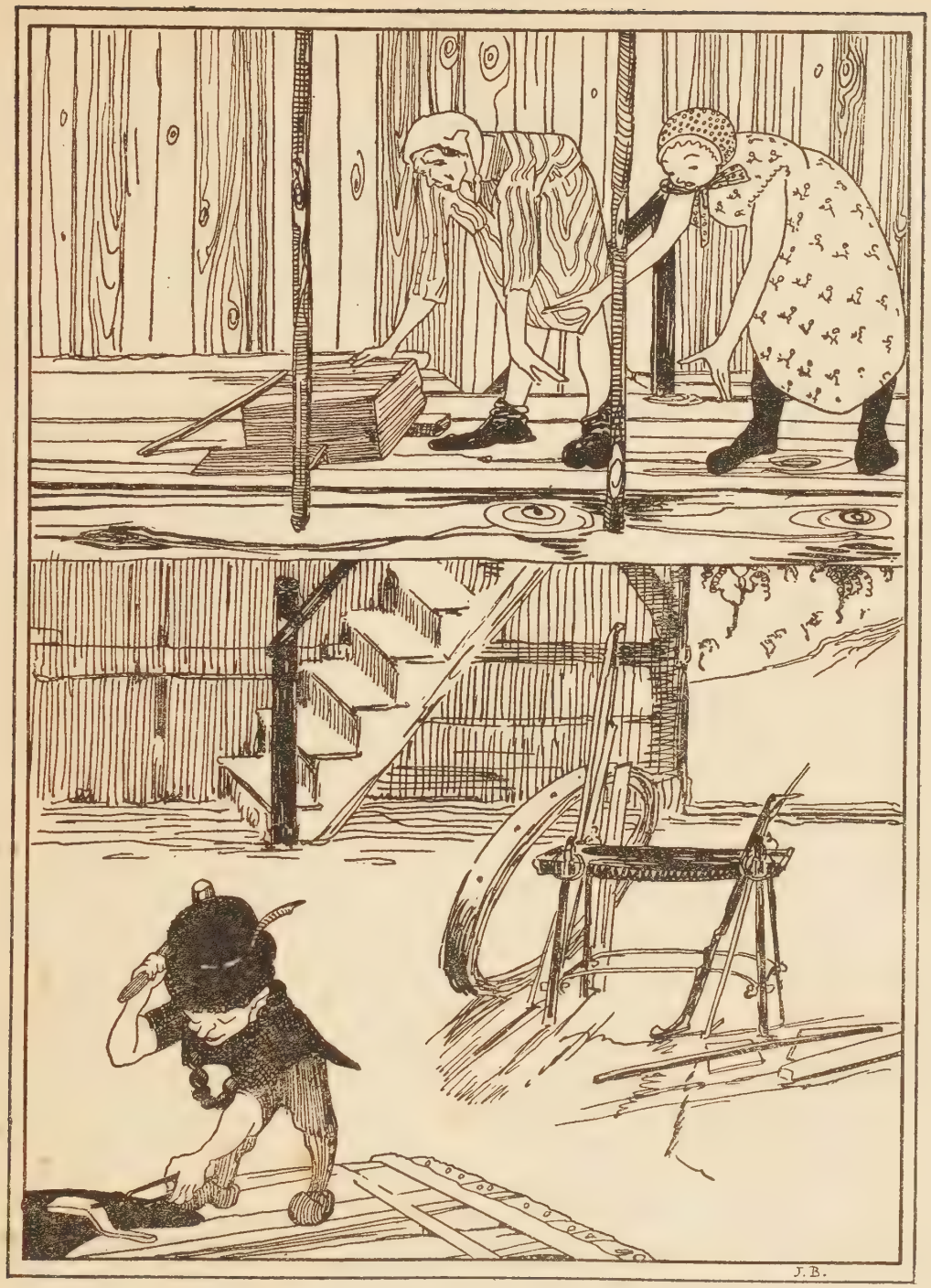
Treading cautiously, he approached the dwarf. He discovered that the dwarf's hat had fallen into the crack, and that his arm was not long enough to reach it. He immediately pulled it out and handed it to him.

The little fellow thanked the smith, and said, "You will be rewarded for what you have done for me to-day. We had a feast here to-day, during which we are obliged to wear our caps on our heads. If I had lost mine I should not have been able to attend the feasts for seven years."

It goes without saying that the smith related his strange adventures to his wife, and they were very curious to know how the dwarf would reward them.

Every night before going to bed the blacksmith prepared the work which he and his apprentice would begin the first thing in the morning.

Picture his surprise the next day, when he found that the work had been done during the night, and by such skilled hands that there was no fault to find with it. His assistant, still serving his apprenticeship, was incapable of such work. Who the clever workman could be he failed to discover.



THEY WANTED TO FIND OUT HOW IT WAS DONE

When the same thing happened the following night, the smith and his wife decided to keep watch. They wanted to find out how it was done.

The mystery was soon cleared up. Towards midnight, the smith, looking through the chinks in the boards of the attic, saw the little dwarf whose hat he had restored to him come in. The little fellow immediately set to work, and worked without a pause till morning. It was splendid to see how quickly he did it, and during this time he did more work than the smith and his assistant could do in half a day.



ANOTHER SET OF VERY FINE MATERIAL

This went on for some time. The smith sent away his assistant, although his custom had increased, and he earned much money, so that he and his wife and children enjoyed good times, and saved a large sum.

The smith and his wife very often watched the dwarf at his work, and they consulted together to see in what way they could reward his kindness. One day his wife said, " I have an idea ; didn't you notice last time that his clothes looked rather shabby ? I shall make him another set of very fine material." This was done. The wife made the dwarf a set of clothes fit for a prince, and in the evening it was folded neatly and placed on a chair in the smithy. The smith and his wife went into the attic to see what would happen.

The dwarf was delighted with the clothes. He unfolded them and examined them one by one, and his smiling face showed how pleased he was. He put the garments on, and when he was dressed, he put on his little red hat decorated with a feather.

He was as proud as a peacock, and greatly pleased with him-

THE DWARF'S FEAST

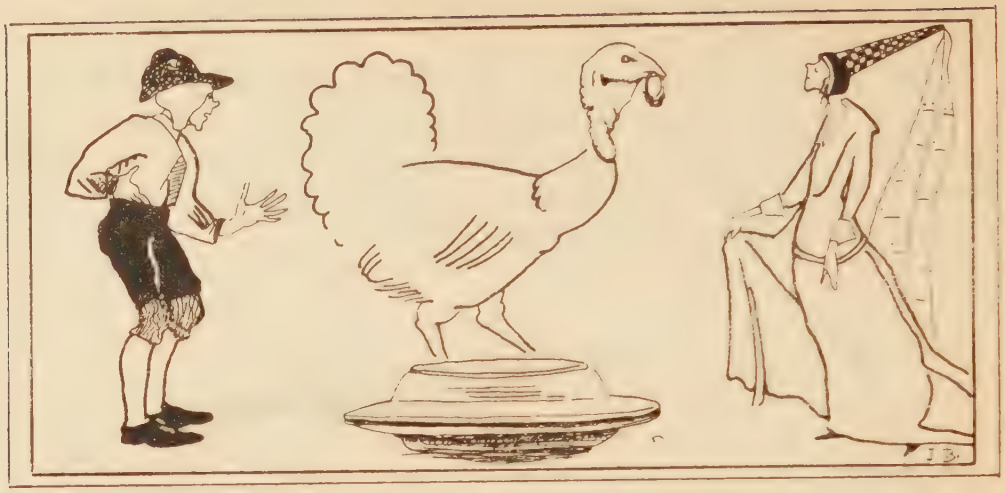




self. At length he turned to the door and disappeared, this time without doing a stroke of work.

The blacksmith never saw the little imp again. The work prepared overnight was no longer finished in the morning. The smith was obliged to do the work himself, but his two eldest sons could help him now, and so, thanks to the dwarf, they were always able to keep the wolf from the door.





THE WIZARD, THE TURKEY, AND THE COUNTESS

PERCY THE WIZARD NICKNAMED SNAIL



ONG ago, when women spun at their spinning-wheels, there lived a man who was nicknamed Snail.

Snail was very fond of a glass, and his wife had a weakness for hotchpotch.

Every week Percy Snail took the thread his wife had spun to market. His wife never scolded him for losing a few pennies, or being muddle-headed on the way back, provided he brought all the necessary ingredients for a nice hotchpotch.

One day he sold the thread at a high price. He was in good spirits; all the way home he rattled the money in his pocket, thinking, "To-day I shall be able to have more than one glass." He went into every little wayside inn he passed, in order to see where the best liquor was sold. Little by little his money began to disappear, until he had scarcely any left, and he realized at the same time that he was rather intoxicated. He stumbled along the road as well as he could, and on putting his hand in his pocket, found, to his great surprise, that he had only five farthings.

He counted them over and over again until he was forced to



THE NECESSARY INGREDIENTS FOR A NICE HOTCHPOTCH

believe his eyes. The worst of it was that he had quite forgotten his wife's favourite dish. He continued his way meditating and calculating, and quite unconsciously entered another inn. In a second his last farthing was in the innkeeper's pocket.

He suddenly felt very tired and fell asleep with his head on the table. When he awoke he felt better, and his head was clearer. He considered what he had better do. He dared not return home as he knew what a warm welcome he would have ! He could not stay in the inn as he had spent all his money, and innkeepers do not give credit. Although undecided, he was about to leave the inn, when the innkeeper, pleased to have a chat so early in the evening, told him that the countess who lived at the neighbouring castle had had a ring set with diamonds stolen.



IF I COULD DISCOVER THE THIEF

The wealthy lady, who set great value on the ring, had promised a reward of a hundred crowns to the finder.

"Well, upon my soul," thought Percy, contemplating his empty glass, "that would be a stroke of luck for me ; if I could discover the thief, I should be saved."

Without answering the innkeeper, he got up, went off at once to the castle, and introduced himself as a wizard.

The countess promised him a hundred crowns if in three days he succeeded in discovering the thief. If he failed to do so, he would be sent away in disgrace.

The first day he searched all the nooks and crannies in the garden for the lost jewel. He ferreted in every bush and ditch, turned over every mole-hill, but in vain. Quite by chance, while he was feeling in the moss and the grass, he saw three



ONE OF THEM WHISPERED TO THE OTHERS

servants talking excitedly together. Very ashamed at the thought that these men should have witnessed his useless and ridiculous search, Snail passed by them still in a bent position, but at the same time glanced defiantly at them.

Now a strange thing happened. He had hardly turned his back on the three men when one of them whispered to the others, so low that Percy was unable to hear what they were saying, " Beware, my friends, be careful what you say. This strange wizard looked at us as though he were watching us ; has he already discovered the thief ? "

In the evening, after Percy Snail had had his supper, the countess ordered a valet to show him to his room. Percy was very depressed ; one day had passed without his having discovered a single clue. He sank into a chair with a deep sigh, and as the servant was leaving the room, muttered under his breath, " Poor fellow ! That is one of the three."

When the servant heard this he was very frightened. He rushed downstairs and said to his comrades, " My friends, we

are lost, this stranger has discovered everything." He told them what he had heard. From that moment they avoided Percy.

The second day he searched in the attics and cellars of the castle, but could not find the ring. As chance would have it, in the evening the countess ordered another valet to show Percy Snail to his room. He was more depressed than ever, and flung himself down on the bed, saying to himself, " Poor fellow, you are to be pitied ! That is already the second, and still nothing."

The valet, who listened attentively, repeated these words to his accomplices. " The wretch has certainly discovered all. I bet my life that to-morrow he will tell the countess everything. We shall then be imprisoned as well as lose our good places."



TO OFFER HIM PART OF THEIR SAVINGS

After a long discussion, they decided to confess all to the wizard, to implore him not to betray them to the countess, and to offer him part of their savings.

This was done. They explained their position to Percy Snail, handed him the diamond ring, and the sum of money agreed on between them.

" Are you convinced now," said Snail, taking leave of them, " that your sin will always find you out ? I discovered your villainy during the first hour I passed in the castle. I will keep silence this time, but beware if I find you out again."

Percy Snail, full of cunning, procured a little lump of paste ; in it he concealed the ring, and threw it to some geese and turkeys which were feeding near by.

" Ik, kih, ih-kih ! " said a fat turkey, and " slok," the little lump of paste was swallowed.

An hour or two afterwards Percy asked for the countess.



THREW IT TO SOME GEESE AND TURKEYS



THE COUNTESS HAD TWO DISHES PLACED BEFORE HIM

" Noble lady," he said, " disabuse your mind of all suspicion against your servants. That black turkey is the thief."

The bird was promptly seized and killed.

You can imagine every one's astonishment when the ring was discovered.

Snail thought he would immediately receive the promised reward of a hundred crowns, but he was rudely mistaken.

The countess suspected that she was dealing with a rogue. In order to be quite satisfied on this point she decided to put him to a second test.

" I am lost in admiration at your ability," she said in a forced manner. " I beg you not to go without giving me another proof of your skill."

Snail, who knew full well what she meant, was very ill at ease. However, he boldly replied, " Madam, I am yours to command, one proof more or less is nothing to me."

In the evening, when seated at table for supper, the countess had two dishes placed before him, one on the top of the other.

They fitted so exactly that no one could suspect that a little snail had been placed between them.

" Wizard," said the countess, " listen to me ; if you can tell me what lies between these two dishes, I will give you fifty crowns over and above those you were promised ! If, however, you do not know, you will be turned out of the castle, after receiving as many lashes with the whip as you would have received crowns."

You can imagine how his heart sank within him. He was struck dumb, and could not hide his confusion. He was over an hour cudgelling his brains for an answer, but without success. He dared not open his lips for fear of guessing wrong.

He thought of his wife, and the whipping that awaited him, and his courage slipped away from him. He strained every nerve in his agitation.

" Well, poor Snail, poor Snail," he sighed.

Imagine his surprise when the countess said, " I am beaten, my friend, I am beaten. It is a snail. . . ."

She lifted off the top dish. The insect was lying dead on the lower dish.

Our wizard's joy was boundless. He received the hundred and fifty crowns, and ran home with all speed.

For a whole week he continued to indulge himself with little glasses, and his wife ate hotchpotch every day to the honour and glory of the worthy Snail, who by a stroke of good fortune had become such a clever wizard.





SIMPLE JOHN

SIMPLE JOHN

SIMPLE John had served his master, a cowkeeper, for seven years, when the latter being overwhelmed by misfortunes was obliged to dismiss his servants. Having no money with which to reward John for his faithful service, he proposed to give him the one remaining horse in his stables.

John, who had sometimes driven in the horses from the field on Sunday evenings when the grooms were at the inn, jumped for joy at the suggestion. He thanked his master with all his heart, and led the beast from the stable. He set out on his journey home to his parents' hut, singing :

"You set out on foot, you return on horseback."

In about half an hour he reached a cross-road, where he saw a peasant with a cow harnessed to a plough working in his field.

" What a strange and useful beast," thought John, as he pulled up his horse. " Tell me, man," he cried to the peasant, " is that animal strong enough for such hard work ? "

" If she chooses," replied the other. " I wager she can pull as well as the best horse, and not only can she draw the plough, but she gives milk, which my wife churns into excellent cheeses,

SIMPLE JOHN, THE HORSE, THE COW AND THE PIG







THE BRUSSELS MARKET

that make one's mouth water. If one day we wish to get rid of her we shall take her to the Brussels market, and any one will be pleased to give us a bag of silver for her."

"Good gracious," said John, "my mother should certainly have such a wonderful beast, but as it would cost a bag of silver, I am afraid we shall never have one. If only I could exchange my horse for one!—but no one would do so."

"Oho," thought the peasant, who already scented a bargain, "a horse in exchange for my old worn-out cow, that would be splendid. Listen to me, my friend," he continued; "as you seem such a good fellow I am willing to give you my cow in exchange for your horse. Tell me you are not joking, and that the horse really belongs to you?"

"Certainly," answered John, "to whom should it belong? I have served the same master for seven years, and have received this horse in lieu of wages."

John was in the seventh heaven. "How pleased my mother will be," he cried, and went on his way without further delay.

Soon after his path lay between two fields of ripe corn; suddenly a strange sound arrested him, "Ugh, ugh," and immediately afterwards a farm hand came in sight with a willow twig in his hand, driving a pig down the winding path.

"Well, well," said John, "what a pretty creature, what funny, roguish eyes, and what a curious corkscrew tail! Tell me what that pretty beast is called."

"This one?" said the boy. "Tell me first what you call the animal you are leading, and then I will tell you what kind of pig mine is."

"It is a cow," said John. "She gives milk, which is churned into cheeses. I bought it for nothing. I only gave my horse, which I received as reward for seven years' service."

"Good," replied the other. "You only gave a horse in exchange for your cow. Well, my beast makes its owner's fortune, and is certainly worth more than a cow. If he finds something to nibble he rapidly becomes as fat as butter. Then he is slaughtered and cut open. It is incredible what comes out of him: liver, kidneys, ears, trotters, sausages, black-puddings, ham, bacon, and carbonades. You can make brushes with his bristles. Of course such an animal costs more than a foolish cow."



"LIVER, KIDNEYS, SAUSAGES"

"Oh, dear!" sighed John, when he heard this, "that is a lot of money. It is quite beyond the likes of me."

"Listen," said the other; "as you seem so anxious to have the animal—well, because it is you, and to give you pleasure, I will exchange it for your cow."

"Hurrah!" cried John, "mother will be pleased." He was more overjoyed than ever. Then he went on his way, driving the pig.

He soon reached the outskirts of the village, and was at once startled by a hoarse voice, which cried unceasingly:

"Any knives or scissors to grind."



THE EXCHANGES OF SIMPLE JOHN

Whrr, whrrr. John drew near and was struck dumb with amazement when he saw a wonderful machine, whirring round, at which a man was seated, shouting as he worked.

" Well," said the man, " you are looking so attentively at my grindstone ; would you like to learn the trade ? "

" Isn't it too difficult ? " said John.

" Not really difficult ; a clever boy like you would learn in no time. Yes, yes, my lad, it is a merry trade, and pays well. If you know your job, your grindstone works unceasingly and turns merrily all day long. Ah, my lad, if grindstones were not so expensive, every one would be able to earn a living."

" Oh," said John, " are these stones so dear ? What did the one you are using cost ? "

" Half a dozen pigs would pay for it. If you would like one, I have another which I would give you for your pig, in which case your fortune is made." He showed him a fine large grindstone which lay at the bottom of his cart.

" My fortune is made," said John ; " I will willingly give my pig in exchange for this stone."

He shouldered the stone and walked on. Unfortunately it was very heavy, and being very hot, John stooped down to drink at a stream without putting down his load. He managed very well, when suddenly the stone slipped and fell into deep water.

" Everything considered," said John, " it is just as well it has happened ; the weight was breaking my back, and I shall be home all the sooner."

He shouted joyously and ran towards the house.

" Little mother," he cried, " I have had great luck ; I exchanged a horse for a cow, a cow for a pig, and a pig for a grindstone. The stone was very heavy, and I lost it. Now I have nothing to carry, nothing to look after. Mother, I am the happiest John in the whole world."





THE TWO CHICKENS

THE TWO CHICKENS OR THE TWO EARS



ONE day a parish priest had invited a relative to luncheon and wished to give him something nice to eat. He ordered two tender young chickens to be killed and plucked.

In the morning, before celebrating Mass, he said to his servant :

" Cook the two chickens for lunch and prepare them as nicely as possible, as my cousin is very fond of his food."

" All right, your Reverence," replied the servant.

When the chickens were roasted, wanting to know if they were done to a turn, she cut off a piece of the wing.

" It wants another five minutes," she thought ; she then took another little piece. That so whetted her appetite that she continued to take pickings until nearly all the chicken had disappeared.

One is worse than useless," she thought, so the second chicken disappeared after the other.

Crying bitterly she went to find the cousin.

" Oh, sir ! oh, sir ! " she cried.

" What is the matter, Catherine, a misfortune ? Has his Reverence caught measles ? " he asked.



THE FIRST THING HE DID WAS TO TAKE UP HIS KNIFE

" Worse than that, sir," sighed Catherine. " I must tell you everything. The vicar has been so strange lately. Sometimes when he returns from the church and finds a visitor awaiting him, without saying a word he begins to sharpen his knife and then cuts off both his ears. You must be on your guard if he seizes his knife when he comes in."

" He will not catch me napping," replied the cousin.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the priest appeared. The first thing he did was to take up his knife. He was very hungry and wanted his luncheon at once.

" I will be off," thought the cousin, and he ran like a hare.

" Can you tell me why the wretched man has run away ? " the priest asked the servant.

" He has stolen the two fat chickens and thought it wiser to disappear."

" What ! stolen my chickens ! " cried the priest.

" Hallo ! Hallo ! " he shouted as loud as ever he could, " at least leave me one."

Of course the priest meant one chicken, but his cousin, thinking that it was a question of his ears, shouted back :

" No, no, I prefer to keep them both."



THE WONDERFUL FISH



BEMOANING HER FATE AND REPROACHING THE ALMIGHTY



The Fisherman, the Fish, the Sea-King, and Susie Grill

THE WONDERFUL FISH

AMID the sand-hills in Flanders not far from La Panne there lived a fisherman named Tintelentyn. He was very poor; he worked from morning till night and very often spent half the night wading in the water with his shrimping-net.

He had not been able to save enough money to build a little house. Meanwhile he and his idle wife, Susie Grill, lived in an old bathing-machine which they had received in exchange for some shrimps.

Fisherman Tintelentyn was a good man and never complained of his hard lot. His wife, on the contrary, who considered she had married beneath her, lay in the grass in front of the machine day after day bemoaning her fate and reproaching the Almighty for not giving her the riches enjoyed by her friends and acquaintances.

Poor Tintelentyn received the full brunt of her bad temper. In spite of his hard work she reproached him with being stupid and lazy.

Susie Grill being in a temper, the good man, despite an unfavourable tide, took up his nets and went to the sea. He cast his nets in despair. He was doomed to disappointment, for on drawing in his nets he only found some shells, seaweed, and starfish; not a single shrimp nor even a little crab.

He was very downhearted and perplexed, when suddenly he saw something red shining in one of his nets. On closer examination he saw that the red thing was alive ; it was a fish, which seemed to be looking at him with its silvery eyes.

" Poor little fish," the good man said in pitying tones, " I am sorry to have caught you. You are too pretty and too rare to fry. However, I dare not throw you back into the sea, for Susie Grill will be so angry if I return empty-handed."

Imagine Tintelentyn's amazement when the pretty fish, which he held in the hollow of his hand, stood up on its tail and began to speak in a piping voice :



STOOD UP ON ITS TAIL

" Little fisherman Tintelentyn,
Do not fry my bright red skin.
I beg you throw me back into the sea,
And all you may wish you shall have from me."

Without hesitation and with never a thought of reward, the fisherman threw the strange fish into the waves. He was about to cast his nets for the second time when he saw his wife coming towards him with her arms akimbo. She immediately began to rail against him :

" Tintelentyn, you stupid man,
What shall we put in the frying-pan
If you throw back into the sea
The only fish you caught for me ;
If you prefer poverty all your life,
You can go and find another wife."

At first the poor man was too much astonished to answer. When he recovered, he tried to excuse himself, telling her that the fish he had caught was no ordinary fish, that he had looked at him so sadly and had implored him so gently and with promises of reward to give him his freedom. His wife became still more furious. " What ! " she cried, " that fish would have made our fortune. You had only to make a wish and we should have been saved from this misery. You have thrown this wonderful fish back into the sea without even asking for a good catch of



A Lovely House with Lofty Towers

shrimps. You are an ass! Cast back your nets and wish for a large and beautiful house with turrets, such as the wealthy live in. It must have marble steps and be well furnished. If you do not catch the fish again, I shall run away and you will never see me again."

When the good man drew in his nets again, he found the red fish. When he let it wriggle in the palm of his hand, it again looked at him with pleading eyes and spoke in a very piping voice :

" Little fisherman Tintelentyn,
Do not fry my bright red skin.
I beg you throw me back into the sea,
And all you may wish you shall have from me."

The fisherman cast a frightened glance towards his wife, who was seated on the dry sand. Then with much hesitation he said :

" O little fish so red and fine,
You shall live, O little fish mine;

But Susie Grill my wife desires
A lovely house with lofty towers,
Everything of the best must be,
O little fish, will you help me ? "

The fish stood up on its tail and said :

" Susie Grill, she is neither mad nor shy,
What she has wished for is now close by."

The fisherman threw the fish back into the sea and turned homewards. Oh ! how wonderful ! There on the highest sand-hill, where the bathing-machine had stood, was a beautiful house. He could hardly wait to collect his nets, he was so anxious to know whether this time his wife would receive him more amiably.

Proud as a peacock she awaited him on the marble steps :

" Well, Grilly," he asked, " are you pleased with me ? "

" Listen," she replied, " it is true I now live in a beautiful house with turrets, a marble staircase and rooms exquisitely furnished, but I have no money. Go back to the sea . . . catch the fish again and ask him to give us as much money as the richest man on the coast between Ostend and Dunkirk. Woe betide you if you return without it ! "

The good man again returned to the sea, and when he had caught the fish and the latter again asked for his freedom, the fisherman answered, much embarrassed at asking yet another favour :

" O little fish so red and fine,
You shall live, O little fish mine ;
But Susie Grill my wife
Wants to lead an easy life,
Heaps of silver and gold.
You will think her very bold.
But little fish, never mind,
O little fish to her be kind."

Again the fish arose and replied :

" Susie Grill is neither shy nor bold,
She shall have riches and wealth untold."

When Tintelentyn returned, he found his wife in her bedroom seated before a large chest overflowing with gold. She counted

it without ceasing, arranging it in piles of a hundred on the table. Before the chest was another brimful of silver. She told her husband that she was going to Bruges the next morning to buy a coach and four and to engage a staff of servants. Her *chef* was to be a master of his art, he must outrival the Count of Flanders' *chef*.

"Well, are you happy now, little wife?" Tintelentyn murmured.

"Well, to be truthful, no," his wife replied. "I have mentioned the Count of Flanders' *chef*. How foolish I am, as we can have anything we desire—why should I not wish to be the Countess of Flanders? Now I know for what purpose I was born. I shall sit on the throne. I shall be a queen. Go back as quickly as you can to the sea. Tell the fish what I wish, and do not forget to add that you will accept some high position at my court."

When the fisherman cast his net, he noticed that the sky was overcast on the horizon. The waves became more angry than before and a strong breeze was blowing. However, he soon caught the fish and said to him:



SHE COUNTED IT WITHOUT CEASING

"O little fish, so red and fine,
I'll not harm you, little fish mine;
But Susie Grill, O little fish,
Has yet once more another wish.
Fish, dear little fish, I beg you help me,
Now Countess of Flanders she would be."



"I AM NOT DISSATISFIED WITH WHAT YOU HAVE DONE"

Standing up on his tail the fish replied :

"If Susie Grill thinks it her destiny
Countess of Flanders she shall be."

Tintelentyn could hardly believe his eyes, when instead of arriving at the house he lived in up to an hour ago he found himself in front of a palace, with pointed towers so high that they seemed to disappear into the clouds. He saw knights and ladies going in and coming out, and grooms in rich liveries. He dared not go in dressed in his ragged fisherman's clothes. Suddenly his wife appeared at an open window with a crown on her head and a sceptre in her hand. She signed to him to approach :

"My man," she said with great importance, "I am not dissatisfied with what you have done. I even feel disposed to reward you handsomely. I require a cup-bearer. Well, I will appoint you to this post on condition that you return



HE SOON CAUGHT THE FISH

once again to the sea and obtain me yet another great honour."

"Good gracious, wife," exclaimed the good man, "are you not overwhelmed with honours? You are richer than the richest man between Ostend and Dunkirk, you hold the title of Countess of Flanders, you wear a crown and sceptre, what more can you possibly desire?"

"You are an innocent," laughed Susie Grill. "Is there not a sky above my head, and is there not a God who reigns in the sky? Go quickly to the sea, catch the red fish. Ask him to make me as powerful as God. If you dare to return without obtaining my wish, you will be hanged."



A MIGHTY SEA-KING

This time Tintelentyn did not hurry. He felt as though his legs were weighted with lead. He stumbled along as though he had been drinking. The sea was rougher than he had ever seen it. A storm was coming up from the west. The wind whistled among the sand-hills, driving the sand before it. Distant thunder rolled and lightning flashed. For the last time the red fish let himself be caught.

"Little Fisherman Tintelentyn,
Do not fry my bright red skin."

He spoke roughly, as though in warning.

"O Tintelentyn, O Tintelentyn,
Do not commit this awful sin."

But the poor fisherman, thinking of the rope which awaited him, said in a trembling voice:

"O little fish so red and fine,
Help once again, little fish mine.

My foolish wife, Susie Grill,
Bids me ask her latest will.
Little fish, I beg you pardon me,
Now powerful as God she wants to be."

He had hardly uttered the words when the fish leaped out of his hand and in his place appeared a mighty sea-king accompanied by mermaids and strange sea-monsters. These words came from the sea-king's mouth like a curse :

" Susie Grill, Susie Grill,
Nevermore shall have her will,
She loses all in committing such sin,
This night you will sleep in your old cabin."

When Tintelentyn reached the sand-hill, Susie Grill, dressed in her old skirt and ragged blouse, was seated in front of the bathing-machine. She was grumbling about the hard times and the small profits to be drawn from shrimps.





The Cobbler and His Wife

THE FRYING-PAN

ONCE upon a time there lived a cobbler who was very fond of pancakes. His wife did not care for them at all. Every time he dared to mention his favourite dish, she replied :

" But, man, how can I make pancakes ? You know quite well we have no frying-pan."

" Well, borrow one from the neighbour," he replied one day.

His wife dared not carry her objections any further. She fetched the frying-pan and she fried and fried as though she were frying for the whole village. She fried for so long that the pan became too hot and broke !

Neither of them wanted to return the frying-pan to their neighbour. This led to a dispute, and the little house, which was generally so peaceful, was in an uproar.

The man said that the person who had borrowed the frying-pan should return it.

His wife said that as it was borrowed for his benefit, he should undertake this unpleasant task.

" Listen," said the cobbler, who was anxious to put an end to the quarrel ; " I have an idea. We cannot keep our neighbour's frying-pan for ever. Whichever of us speaks first, on no matter what subject, must take back the frying-pan."

"Agreed," said his wife. She pursed up her lips and clenched her teeth, as much as to say: "Wild horses will not drag a word out of me."

The next day the neighbours knocked at the door and asked if they could have the frying-pan. Neither vouchsafed an answer. Then they asked the wife, and her only reply was to turn her spinning-wheel more vigorously. Not a word escaped her lips, except a sound which resembled the noise made by young chicks:

"Sjip, sjip, sjip, sjip, sjip."

Then they asked the cobbler, who replied by hammering so loudly on a pair of soles that, unable to stand the noise, they shrugged their shoulders and went out.

The same thing happened to the customers.

The rumour soon spread in the village that the cobbler and his wife had been bewitched.

There was no time to be lost; their friends went to the exorcist to free them from the spell.

The charlatan, with incantations, prepared for the ceremony by crossing himself and sprinkling holy water.

In spite of all his efforts he was no more successful than the other villagers. He only heard the woman say, "Sjip, sjip, sjip," and the man tapping with the hammer.

The exorcist, now at the end of his resources, took the pail of holy water and emptied the contents over the woman's head, she being apparently the most obstinate case.

"Have you finished?" the woman burst out, while the water dripped from her body like snow melting off a snow-man.

"Dear little wife," said the cobbler calmly, "you will take the frying-pan to our neighbour."

The good man threw away the shoe he held in his hand and danced for joy.





NEITHER OF THEM WANTED TO RETURN THE FRYING-PAN



THE THREE FARMERS

FARMER BROOM, FARMER LEAVES, AND FARMER IRON



NCE upon a time there were three peasants who lived in the same wood.

The first had a hut made of broom.

The second had a hut made of leaves.

The third had a hut made of iron.

That is why they were known as Farmer Broom, Farmer Leaves, and Farmer Iron.

One cold winter afternoon a wolf came stealthily into the clearing where the three farmers had built their huts. He hid himself behind a thick bush and hungrily watched the skaters as they glided over the polished surface of the ice. At twilight, just as Farmer Broom had returned home from the forest with a faggot of wood, the wolf knocked at his door, and cried, " Farmer Broom, Farmer Broom, open the door, my friend ; my little hands are so cold, and my little feet are frozen."

" I will not open the door," Farmer Broom replied gruffly.

" Then I shall break it open." The wolf hurled himself with such force against the door that he burst it open, went into the hut, and sat down by the fire.

Farmer Broom was about to peel potatoes, and the wolf





He burst it Open

began to repeat in a hoarse voice, " Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs. Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs."

" What are you muttering about ? " Farmer Broom asked innocently.

" Well," replied the wolf, " you will be the first ! But give me a potato at once ; I am as hungry as can be."

Farmer Broom put a potato on the point of his knife, and held it out at arm's length to the wolf, but the latter swallowed the potato, the knife, and the farmer at a gulp.

The next day the wolf knocked at Farmer Leaves' door, just after the latter had returned with a basketful of dead leaves which he had collected from beneath the snow.

" Farmer Leaves, Farmer Leaves, open the door, my dear friend ; my little feet are so cold, and my little hands are frozen."

" I shall not open it," replied Farmer Leaves.

" Then I shall burst it open," said the wolf, and thereupon

he threw his weight against the door, forced it open, went in and sat down by the fire.

Farmer Leaves was also about to peel potatoes, and the wolf said in a deep voice, " Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs. Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs."

" What are you mumbling ? " asked Farmer Leaves.

" Well," said the wolf, " I was saying a little prayer for you, but, quick, give me a potato, I am dying of hunger."



THE WOLF WENT IN AND SAT DOWN

Farmer Leaves held out his knife with a potato stuck on the end, but again the wolf swallowed the potato, the knife, and the farmer at a gulp.

The third day he went to Farmer Iron. The latter had seen him coming in the distance, as he was entering his hut with a bucketful of water from the well. He placed a large cauldron full of dried peas in the attic. The wolf knocked, and cried," Farmer Iron, Farmer Iron, open the door, my friend; my little feet are so cold, and my little hands are frozen."

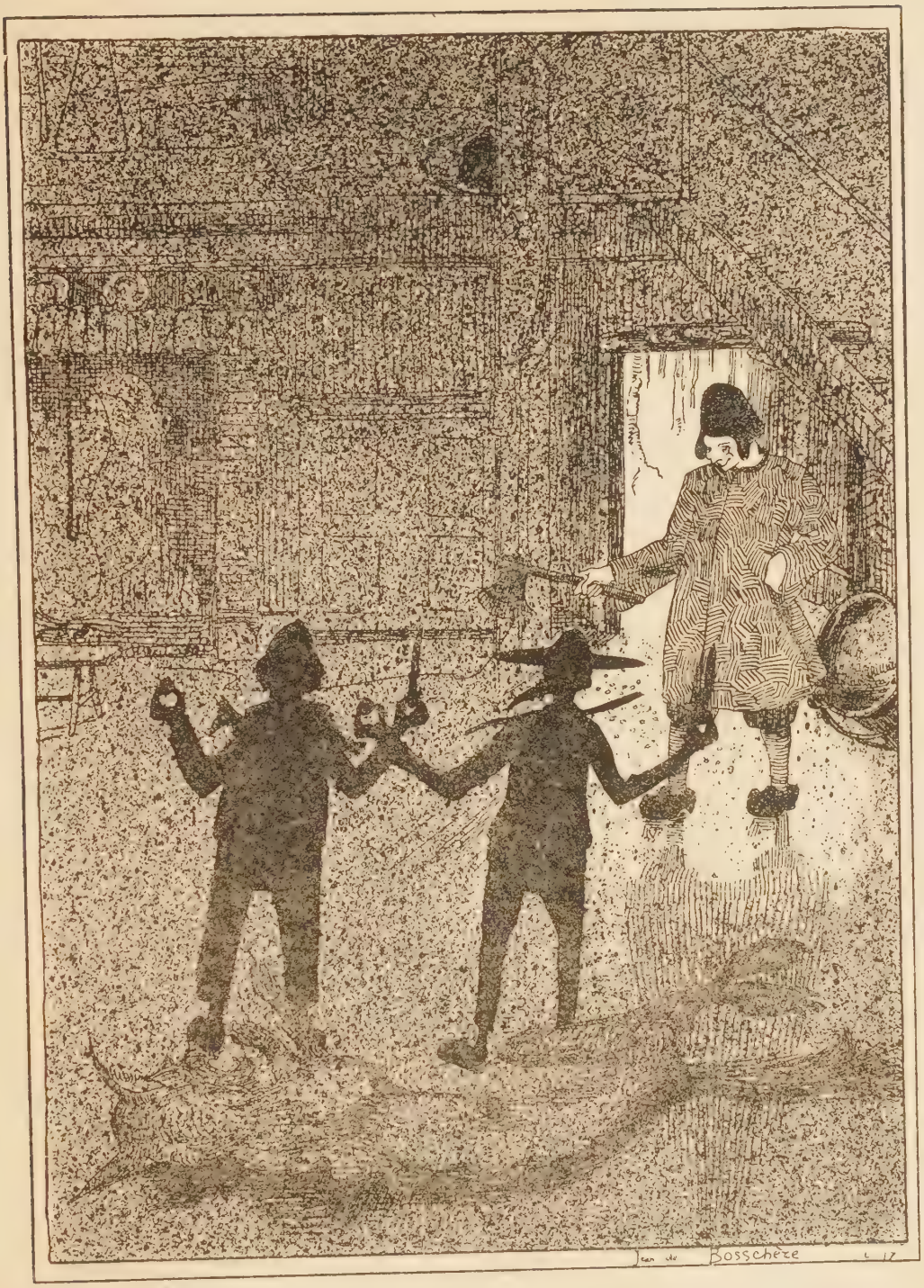
" I shall not open it," said Farmer Iron.

" Then I shall burst it open."

" All right, burst it open," said Farmer Iron.

The wolf made a spring and charged at the door, and dashed himself against it until his paws were torn and bleeding. He lost so much blood that Farmer Iron ended by taking pity on him, and opened the door.

The wolf went in and sat down by the fire with Farmer Iron. Very soon he began to say in a sepulchral voice, " Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs. Warm in the stomach, as I shall have fat pigs."



FARMER BROOM AND FARMER LEAVES CAME OUT ALIVE

" What nonsense are you repeating ? " asked Farmer Iron in a derisive tone.

" Well," said the wolf, " it is a little prayer for you, but give me a potato, my stomach feels quite hollow and empty."

Farmer Iron held out a potato. The wolf was about to swallow it when Farmer Iron suddenly pulled a string and upset the cauldron of dried peas, which made a great noise as they ran out on the attic floor.

" Whatever is it, whatever is it ? " asked the frightened wolf.

" The police who are tracking you down," answered Farmer Iron, laughing. " They want to hang you for eating Farmer Broom and Farmer Leaves."

" Good heavens, Farmer Iron, my friend, tell me where I can hide," begged the wolf.

" Quick, climb into the attic," said Farmer Iron. " I will not betray you."

The wolf rushed to the ladder. Farmer Iron took a large saucepan of boiling water off the fire and put it down at the foot of the ladder. The wolf was in such a hurry that he slipped and fell into the saucepan, and was terribly scalded. Farmer Iron pulled him out, cut him open, and, oh, what joy ! Farmer Broom and Farmer Leaves came out alive, each carrying his knife with a potato on the end.

They all three lifted up the wolf and threw him outside, and each returned to his own hut.

This is what happened in that wonderful country where after you are dead you live happy ever after.





LODEWYK AND HIS CARDS

LITTLE LODEWYK AND ANNIE THE WITCH



ITTLE Lodewyk built card houses, but Annie the witch always came to blow them down.

One day little Lodewyk grew tired of this and built himself a stone house. He put in a fireplace and a pump. Now if the witch came she could not blow it down.

Suddenly he heard a knock at the door!

"Who is there?" asked the little man.

"Annie the witch, open the door," was the answer.

"What can Annie the witch want with me?"

"Very little, nothing but a little fire."

"I have no fire."

"You most certainly have, I saw smoke coming out of the chimney."

"Then you must squint, my chimney cannot smoke. I have never lighted the fire; you must have seen the smoke from my neighbour's chimney."

"No, no, I am not to be taken in like that. My eyes are quite straight," and she went off in a huff.

The next day she came back and again knocked at the door.

" Who is there ? " asked little Lodewyk.

" It is I, my good man, Annie the witch."

" What can Annie the witch want with me again ? "

" Nothing much, only a pail of water."

" You know very well I have no water."

" Most certainly you have water, for I heard it gurgling in the pump."

" Then you have very strange ears. I have never raised the pump-handle. No doubt the noise you heard came from my neighbour's house."

" I warn you that if you refuse to open the door I shall cut off your head."

Little Lodewyk was terrified ; he put the chain on the door and hid himself up the chimney.

In spite of this the witch went in and searched for him everywhere, but she could not find him. However, at last she discovered him seated in the chimney, and dragged him down by the hair of his head.

" Put your head on the table that I may cut it off," commanded the witch, opening wide her red eyes.

" Willingly Annie, but tell me how," said Lodewyk, who had a scheme in his head. " Show what I am to do."

" Very well, place your head like this ! " cried Annie the witch, and she placed her large and hideous head quite unsuspectingly on the table.

Lodewyk quickly seized his axe and cut off the witch's head.

Then little Lodewyk calmly fried a herring for his supper and smoked a pipe.

And then there came a pig with a long snout.

And the little story has run out.





ANNIE THE WITCH ALWAYS CAME TO BLOW THEM DOWN



THE GIANT AND FIVE HIGHWAYMEN

THE GIANT OF THE CAUSEWAY

IN olden days there was a feudal castle on the site where now stand the Causeway and Giant's Mount, in the town of Brussels.

A giant lived in this castle who is reputed to have been over nine feet high.

This noble giant was generally beloved and esteemed, for in spite of his capricious and brusque character, he was ever ready to exert his superhuman strength in the defence of the weak. He rebuked the powerful, exterminated brigands and robbers, and cleared the roads of highwaymen.

From the tower of his castle, which he had built on high ground, he had a commanding view of the surrounding country.

He never left his castle except to inflict punishment on the wicked, or in order to protect the weak.

He consecrated all his leisure to his dear and beautiful daughter Helen. She was his only child by his beloved wife, who died in giving her birth.

From her childhood Helen was accustomed to a secluded life and had never left the castle grounds. In summer she amused herself with her sewing on the top of the tower.



HE NEVER LEFT HIS CASTLE EXCEPT TO INFLICT PUNISHMENT
ON THE WICKED

One day, when her father was scouring the country, she ventured to take a little walk in the Valley of the Brook. She had only taken a few steps outside the castle grounds when, on turning the corner of a little path, she found herself face to face with a knight in armour, of comely appearance.



SHE VENTURED TO TAKE A LITTLE WALK

As soon as the latter saw Helen, he stood still, spellbound by the youth and beauty of the young girl. He loved her at first sight, and bewitched by her shy, maidenly demeanour, flung himself at her feet. Helen, for her part, stood bewildered at these demonstrations of respect and adoration.

Suddenly her father appeared, followed by four prisoners he had captured. He was leading them by a cord. He took in the situation at a glance, and said to the knight, who was lost in contemplation of the young maiden, "How dare you kneel at my daughter's feet?"

"Sire," replied the knight, "pardon me, I pray you. I love your daughter, and love has drawn me to her feet."

Helen trembled, for she had also fallen in love.

"Who are you?" asked the giant.

He questioned the knight in such a severe manner that the maiden shivered, and blushing with shame took her father's hand, murmuring words only intelligible to him.

"I am Harry of Housestone," replied the young man; "I was knighted by Lothario."

" That is sufficient; be quite frank with me."

" I see your gentle daughter for the first time. The sight of her fills me with a happiness which radiates through all my being. I feel that without her life is not worth living. If, sire, I am fortunate enough to have won her favour, I pray you to give me her hand."

" You are worthy to be my son-in-law," replied the giant. " However, I have sworn that I will only give her in marriage to whoever shall be able to construct a paved roadway in a single night. The next day at dawn he must be able to take her on horseback down the Causeway bordered by columns to St. George's Chapel."

After this speech he glanced ironically at the knight, and taking Helen by the hand led her home. As she was about to cross the threshold the young maiden cast a sad and tender glance at the Knight of Housestone, who was completely disheartened by the giant's impossible demands.

" Let me consider," said the young lover, suddenly raising his head, " if there is a way to perform this task."

But by the time he had estimated the length of the ground and the depth of the



TOOK HER FATHER'S HAND

ravine on which he had to construct a paved way in a single night, and had realized the impossibility of carting the necessary stones for the colonnade, he groaned and sighed in dire despair.

" Night is falling," he cried ; " I will try my last resource. I will go and see if the miners who work in my uncle's copper-mines could do this work before dawn."

He at once started off to the Sunny Wood ; he summoned the overseers and asked them if they could build a paved roadway from the Giant's Castle to the town gates in a single night.



HE WAS NO MORE THAN THREE FEET HIGH

The overseers answered him that it would take at least a year, employing a thousand workmen a day, to execute such a work.

Harry, in deep dismay, took his homeward road, completely overwhelmed by his misfortunes. On the way he saw a little black-haired man, with a tall green hat and white pointed beard, leaning against a tree. He was not more than three feet high. He looked at the young knight with flaming eyes.

" You look sorrowful, Knight of Housestone ; no mortal power can help you in your distress . . . but if you like I can overcome your difficulties."

" Oh, whoever you may be, you are very welcome," replied the knight, holding out his hand. " But who are you ? "

" I am the spirit of the copper-mines your uncle is working. I live in the underground caves, and his excavations are a source of great annoyance to me. If you will promise that the mining shall cease, that the galleries and shafts shall be filled in, in order that I and my companions may live in peace in the bowels



LED BY TWO PAGES



About Midnight a terrible Storm arose

of the earth, we will this night construct the road and the colonnade demanded by the giant. To-morrow you will marry Helen."

" I can promise no such thing, for my uncle has a son who is heir to all he possesses."

" His son, who was a good-for-nothing, was killed this morning by a man-at-arms whom he had had flogged yesterday. You are now your uncle's sole heir."

After saying a prayer for the repose of the soul of his cousin, Harry placed his left hand on the hilt of his sword, and holding out the other to the dwarf, he said, " I swear to do as you request immediately after my uncle's death."

" Enough," replied the dwarf, " to-morrow at dawn repair to the spot where the road should begin, and all you will have to do is to fetch your bride."

About midnight a terrible storm arose, the wind rooted up the tall trees, and the thunder rolled.

Helen, aroused by these alarming sounds, shaking with fear, got up and sought protection in her father's room.

THE GIANT, HIS DAUGHTER, AND THE KNIGHT



" Do not be alarmed, my child," the giant said softly, " it is the devil chasing some wild beast of the forest."

" But do you not hear the sound of hammers, the rumbling of wheelbarrows, and confused noises, as though a crowd of men were at work ? "

" It is possible," replied the giant, looking out of the window ; " but if Housestone is attempting to perform the task I set him, he must be mad."

As he shut the window again a puff of wind blew out the lamp. At the same moment the storm abated, and all was calm and still as on other nights.

Helen had not a moment's rest. At daybreak she ran up to the tower. Her surprise and joy were boundless when she saw a magnificent archway glittering in front of the castle, and beyond it stretched a splendid road, at the end of which she saw Harry of Housestone mounted on a black horse, followed by a beautiful white ambling nag, led by two pages.

On hearing her joyous cries her father appeared. All the giant had demanded was done. The Knight of Housestone was married to Helen the same day, and on his uncle's death he faithfully fulfilled his promise to the dwarf of the underworld. He ordered the shafts and galleries to be filled up in the copper-mines, and to this day no one has been able to discover where they are.



THE KEY-FLOWER

IN Flanders the cowslip is called the key-flower. The story I am about to tell you will explain why it is so named.

A little child died. Its little soul was as innocent and pure as freshly fallen snow. As a dove freed after long captivity flies straight into the blue sky, so the little soul flew into God's Heaven and knocked at the gate.

St. Peter with his large golden key drew back the heavy lock, half opened the door and looked through the crack.

On seeing who was there, he opened the door wide and welcomed in the new little angel.

But behold, when the Saint was about to close the door, he let fall the bunch of keys with a thud on the golden threshold. Before he was able to pick them up they had slipped from the threshold into the fathomless blue.

They fell through space for two or three days and landed in a cemetery at the entrance to a little village.

Scarcely had they touched the earth, where they sparkled amidst the grass and the flowers, when a beautiful new flower sprang to life which had never been seen on earth before and was therefore without a name.

Early next morning a little orphan girl went to the cemetery to put flowers on her mother's grave. She soon discovered this strange flower poised so proudly on its stalk. She was very surprised to find the pretty little bell flowers, which were certainly not growing there the day before, and which she had never seen.

She stooped down to examine the plant more closely and was amazed to find in the bushes a bunch of golden keys held together by a gold ring on which she read the word " Heaven."

The discovery of the new flower and the bunch of keys was fully discussed in the village, and the news spread far and wide. Every one came to see the new flower. They called it the Key of Heaven, by which name it has been known ever since.



HE LET FALL THE BUNCH OF KEYS



Ripe Nuts in their Cups

THE OGRE

THIS time I am going to talk about myself, to tell you something that really happened to me. If you do not believe this you must not listen. I can only tell this story to children who are quite sure that I speak the truth.

I was between six and seven years old and still learning my letters at school. One fine Sunday afternoon in September I went with five or six of my schoolfellows into the Aulnes wood.

It was the nut season, and we knew there were a number of nut-trees in the wood.

After gathering nuts for some time on the edge of the wood, it happened that in going from tree to tree we gradually separated from each other. Before I became aware of it, I was deep in the wood. There I discovered a sort of hedge where the nuts grew so plentifully that I could hardly believe my eyes.

The spreading branches were weighed down with nuts in bunches of four, five, or even six ripe nuts in their yellow cups, hanging so temptingly.

At first I ate a good many and had a regular feast. I had never eaten such nuts ! There were no bad ones and no empty shells. When I had eaten as many as I wanted, I filled my

pockets, all my pockets. First the pockets of my Sunday coat, then my trouser pockets. I then filled my cap and tied some up in my handkerchief. Just as I was thinking that I could put in a few more I noticed that it was very still and lonely in the wood and that the nuts did not show up so plainly among the leaves.

High above my head the last rays of the sunset shone among the branches of the huge elms, oaks, and poplars. Here and there a bird chirped on its nest, and far away towards the sunset I heard the sound of wheels on the road.



I FILLED MY POCKETS

I could not hear my companions, but no doubt they were within call, they could not be far off. I put my hands to my mouth and shouted: "Hallo! John! Peter Little Carrots! George!"

I called them all and shouted their names one after the other, shouting louder and louder in all directions. But only the echo answered me. When I shouted John, the echo mockingly replied "Ohn," and when I shouted George, it replied "Orge."

Suddenly my heart sank within me, the last rays of light disappeared above my head and with startling rapidity darkness fell among the trees and bushes. The darkness seemed to grow out of the ground. The birds were silent. A cold breeze shook the branches, and far, far away a little bell rang out the Angelus.

I recognized the bell, it was our village bell. I knew that the carriage I had heard was the post-cart which was returning from Ternath to Lennick.

It was in the direction of these two sounds that I had to find a road, however. I could not imagine how far I was from the edge of the wood, and it was imperative that I should reach the fields before darkness overtook me.

I started off with my cap full of nuts in one hand and my handkerchief full in the other.

After going a few steps, I shouted again, "John! Peter!"

but this time even the echo made no reply and my voice sounded so strangely in my ears that I did not recognize it.

I ran for about an hour and a half, when all at once I felt as though I was bound with ropes and I fell. I was held fast by the long tendrils of a blackberry-bush which I had not noticed in the gathering darkness.

I dropped my handkerchief and could barely distinguish it in the darkness.

I then shouted again as loudly as ever I could until I lost courage and could shout no more. I dared not, I dared not, because of the terrible silence which seemed to close round me. The silence was so uncanny that I distinctly heard the blood coursing through my veins.

I was alone, alone in the vast never-ending forest, lost, strayed, and far from the road when night fell. I thought of home, of my gentle mother and my good father. I thought of the terrible anxiety they would be in when I did not return. Feeling my way I sat down on the roots of a tree and began to cry. . . .

I then closed my eyes as tightly as ever I could in order to see nothing. I meant to sit there and see what would happen, but when I raised my eyes to say a short prayer, I saw a soft light piercing through the roof of branches above my head, which seemed to me like a smiling face trying to throw its silver rays upon me.



I SAW SOMETHING WHITE

It was the moon; she was rising in the opposite direction to which I had seen the last rays of the sinking sun. As my eyes grew accustomed to the light I began to distinguish things around me. At first the tree-trunks, some as thick as my body, others as thick as my head, others as thick as my legs and arms. Then I saw the shrubs and bushes, the flowers in the grass, and the ferns.

Suddenly I saw something white—a little weasel—which approached very cautiously. Had I moved a little twig? Quick

as lightning the little fellow darted off. I saw him disappearing like a white arrow.

Now I could see I was not so frightened. I got up, emptied my cap and put it on my head, determined to try once again to find a path. I started off in the same direction as the weasel had disappeared. I had walked for about a quarter of an hour when, my heart beating violently, I stopped—something like a star shone very low, low among the foliage—no, so low that it could not be a star—it must be either a light from a lantern or a window. Certainly some one must be passing with a light or living in a little house.

However far it might be, I decided to walk towards it. I groped on hands and knees, keeping out of the way of brambles and bushes. Then it was easier walking among the trunks of the tall trees. I was always trying to reach the light. Oh, dear! what a long way it was. The moon was already far behind me above the trees. It was a beautiful starlit night. Far, far away a church clock struck. I could not tell this time if it were our village clock ; it struck nine and still I had not reached the light. Sometimes it grew larger, then it disappeared for some time. I was very frightened. Would it never appear again ? Thank heavens ! the little star twinkled once more . . . suddenly it was so near that I could see it growing. Now it was as large as an egg—then as large as an orange—and finally I saw it as large as the face of the moon high among the bushes. Now I could see how the light showed up in a disc on a dark surface.



COULD I DARE TO KNOCK ?

A few steps farther and I found myself outside a little house. A light shone through a round opening in the shutter. Under the window was an old broken barrel. There was no sound to be heard in the house. Could I dare to knock ? Did robbers, a witch, or, worse still, an ogre live there ?

To stay out all night was equally dangerous ; there might be wolves or savage dogs in the wood, and witches and ogres could soon scent me out.

I tapped on the shutter, and very soon heard footsteps approaching.

" Who knocks so late ? " asked an anxious voice.

" I am a little boy from a neighbouring village, I have lost my companions and have been wandering for three hours in the wood. Please open the door and let me come in."

I heard the sound of a heavy sigh behind the door and then the voice said more gently than before :

" Oh, my child, do not ask to come in here ! Get away as fast as your legs can carry you. I would willingly give you shelter ! But my husband is an ogre. He devours without pity all who fall into his hands."

However, I felt so weary, I was chilled by the cold night air, and the loneliness of the wood so terrified me that to be under cover of a roof with human beings I was willing to run all risks.

To be eaten alive by an ogre was not a very agreeable prospect ! But if I continued to wander about in the woods at night, I ran the danger of coming face to face with this awful man. Perhaps under his own roof I should be in less danger of being eaten.

I begged and implored so earnestly that the woman gave in and opened the door.

" Little friend," the good soul said to me, " you have not a moment to lose. It is nearly ten o'clock, it is at that hour that my husband returns from his first round. Here is a little bread and milk. If you are hungry and thirsty, eat and drink ! Take good heed of what I am going to say to you ! Directly you hear a knock at the door, hide yourself in the dark corner by the cupboard behind those two large tubs. If you value your life do not move a muscle. If my husband finds you, he will eat you, skin, bones, and all. If you are as quiet as a mouse I may save you, God helping me."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when " bang, bang, bang," the door shook under the blows of a heavy fist. A rough voice, at the sound of which my blood ran cold, shook the little house.

" Great heavens ! woman ! How much longer must I wait before you open the door ? "

Before the wife had lifted the latch, I was crouching behind the two tubs. I made myself as small as possible. I was so

terrified that I shrank with fear. I shrank more and more, sometimes I felt as small as a little dog, then as small as a cat, and then as small as a frog!

Do you know why I was so frightened? While the woman was going towards the door I very quickly lifted the lid of each tub. Oh, horror! what did I see inside? One tub was filled with milk, but the other was filled to the brim with human flesh! Hands, feet, heads of little boys about my own age, and all were sprinkled with a quantity of coarse salt.



BEHIND THOSE TWO LARGE TUBS

A tread like that of a giant sounded on the hard earth floor of the house. From between the two tubs I saw the Ogre stop in the middle of the room. His nostrils suddenly dilated as he sniffed around him like a hound. His eyes sparkled—he smacked his lips.

"Wife," he burst forth in thunderous tones, "wife, I smell it! There is young and tender human flesh in the house! Speak! Where is it? My mouth waters."



I SMELL HUMAN FLESH

He took a heavy axe from his belt and brandished it in the air in a threatening manner. His wife denied this. "You certainly smell human flesh," she answered, "but you smell the three little boys you put in the brine-tub last Friday. I have not seen a living soul all the blessed day."

"What!" replied the Ogre, and he began to swear. "Thunder and lightning, do you call me a liar? I tell you that I smell a child's fresh and living flesh."

I saw him brandish his axe in the air and fling it into the corner where I was hiding . . . oh, horror! the tub of milk

was shattered to atoms. I should certainly have been in his clutches if I had not become as small as a frog from terror, and was thus carried down the drain, which was hidden by the other tub, in the current of milk.

I found myself lying outside the house, my hair and eyes full of cream. I was half dazed with alarm, but oh, so glad to be outside! I was much colder now than when I knocked at the door. If only I could find a place to rest my weary head. Just in front of me was the empty barrel which I had seen on my arrival at the cottage. The outlet of the drain was exactly under the only window. The moonlight enabled me to see inside the barrel. To my great surprise I found it half full of hay. I soon made up my mind. I crawled into the barrel through the bottom, which had been staved in, drew the hay over me, and, after saying a short prayer, tried to sleep.



I SAW HIS BODY

I slept for some time. When I awoke, my clothes were dried. Very soon I heard a strange growling sound not far from my hiding-place. It sounded like the pattering of paws and a dog growling.

"A wolf," was my first thought, after the Ogre, the wolf which ate Little Red Riding Hood! How should I escape this time?

Suddenly the animal came near and licked the barrel, which had probably contained lard, with its rough tongue.

Looking through the bung-hole, I saw by the light of the moon a large and beautiful dog jumping about.

It suddenly struck me that if I could catch the dog by the tail I would ask him very politely if he would draw me and my tub away—far, far away from this terrible house.

The dog again approached, again I heard his tongue licking the staves. I saw his body exactly opposite the bung-hole—then I spoke to him very gently, as gently and as agreeably as I could. I asked him to do what I wished. Oh, wonderful to

relate, the dog turned round and offered me his tail. I took hold of it and immediately felt myself being drawn forward as though I were in a sledge or a boat.

At first he ran slowly without making a sound, but farther on, about fifty or sixty yards from the little house, I was so enjoying this midnight drive that I grew reckless.

I thought we were travelling too slowly. " Gee up," I cried, " Gee up, little fiery steed ! Show me how you can gallop. Hallo ! Gee up."

I pulled his tail, and the animal not expecting this movement bolted off like the wind.

He ran so wildly that the barrel bounded against the trees until, after a violent blow, it was smashed to pieces. The dog ran off as fast as ever he could.

Dear me ! How the wood had changed ! There was not a star in the sky and the moon had vanished.

Everything was enveloped in a pale grey light. Birds' song filled the air. In the distance, far away outside the wood, a hundred cocks crowed one after the other.

I again thought of my dear parents. I pictured their agony during the long and terrible night, and my heart beat quickly at the thought of being with them once more.

I would soon find the road. If only I could discover in which direction lay the village.

I heard a bell ringing, " Ding, Ding, Ding, Dong." Was it seven o'clock ? Unfortunately the wind whistled so loudly in the tree-tops that the first " Ding " seemed to come from the north, while the last seemed to come from the west. What was I to do ?

Then I had a happy thought. I chose one of the highest trees, a poplar, whose lower branches hung nearly to the ground. I climbed up like a cat from bough to bough and reached the top —from there I could see right over the wood. On one side I saw fields and meadows as far as the eye could see, and on the other I saw my village, my dear little village.

The poplar I had climbed was only twenty yards from the edge of the wood. It was so high that the topmost branches on which I was perched were much higher than the surrounding trees.

My village lay there at the bottom, not far from the edge of the wood. Not far from the wall of the churchyard was the white house, the white house where my parents lived. Oh, if I could only be there, how I longed to be at home.

But I was high up above all the other tree-tops, waving my cap so vigorously in the air that the few remaining nuts fell out. While I was perched there on the top of the tree, it began to sway gently from left to right, then backwards and forwards. Then it swayed so violently that it passed over the top of first two, then three, and then ten trees. The morning breeze seemed to take pleasure in it, and blew stronger and stronger—"whip, whip—whoop, whoop," the tree-top swayed out beyond the top of the trees on the edge of the wood.



I WAS PERCHED THERE ON THE TOP OF THE TREE

Oh, dear! it was so amusing! "Whip, whip," in a huge semicircle over the top of a hundred trees behind me, then in a still wider semicircle in front as far as the first houses of the village. "Whip, whip," backwards farther and farther, then "whoop, whoop," in front as far as farmer Van den Eeckhoudt's farm. Then a few yards farther and I was swaying out almost over my father's house!

Should I dare, should I take the risk? Could I in leaning all my weight make the top of the tree bend so that the rebound would send me right over the house? "Whip, whip—whoop, whoop!" Before I had made up my mind I found myself where I wished to be.

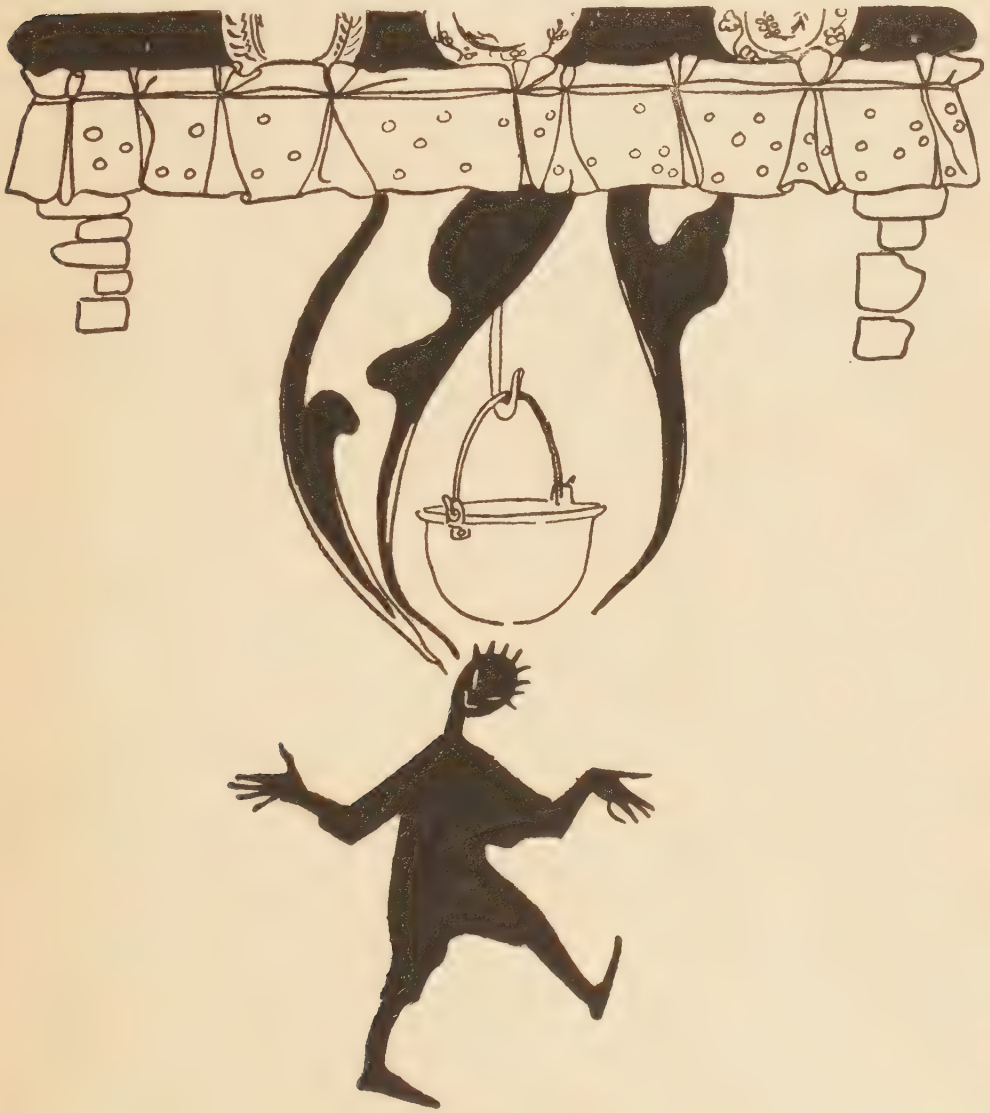
I crossed myself, let go my hold, and landed on the edge of the large chimney-pot. I fell down the chimney into the stove.

My mother was making coffee. "My boy, my boy," she cried, "what an anxiety you have been to us. Your father and I have been up all night."

At that moment my father came in; he had been hunting round his land in search of me for the tenth time.

" My lad," he said to me, when he succeeded in recognizing me, " where have you been and why are you so black ? "

" Father," I answered, " I am black because I have just fallen down the chimney into the house. I have come from the Aulnes wood, where I went to gather nuts yesterday. The Ogre has not eaten me and the wolf did not scent me out. Father, my pockets are full of lovely ripe nuts."



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